

**THE MISSIONARY CHARACTER:
AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE SOCIETY OF INQUIRY IN THE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN
NEW HAVEN, APRIL 1, 1840**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649165926

The missionary character: an address delivered before the Society of Inquiry in the Theological Seminary in New Haven, April 1, 1840 by Eli Smith

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Cover @ 2017

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ELI SMITH

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THE
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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SOCIETY OF INQUIRY

IN THE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN NEW HAVEN,

April 1, 1840.

BY ELI SMITH,

MEMORANT OF THE A. B. C. F. M. TO SYRIA.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY OF INQUIRY.

NEW HAVEN:
PRINTED BY B. L. HAMLIN.

1840.

THIS Address, originally prepared for the Society of Inquiry in the Theological Seminary at Andover, and since delivered at several other Theological Seminaries, is now published at the request of the members of the Society of Inquiry in the Theological Seminary at New Haven, to whom the author dedicates it, with the earnest prayer, that many from among them may be prepared to enter upon the work of Missions, possessed of all those high qualifications, which he has here so feebly attempted to delineate.

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ADDRESS.

I HAVE been invited to address you as a Society of *Inquiry*. The name your organization bears, is understood by none of you, I presume, as referring merely to inquiries of curiosity. Inquiries after personal duty come equally within the department which it occupies. Indeed, do I misjudge in presuming that its members, on the eve of coming forth upon the stage of life, are more anxious than for any thing else, to learn the part which duty calls upon them to act? The proper clue for you to follow in so important a search, is the alternate study of your characters, and of the fields that are open before you, accompanied with prayer to God that he would direct your judgments to a right conclusion.

Among the fields that invite you is that of foreign missions. So extensive, and so far from your personal observation is it, that I presume you will not consider it an unnecessary service, if I attempt, on the present occasion, to portray *the CHARACTER which the work of foreign missions requires.*

I shall assume that you are all inquirers after the claims of the missionary work upon you individually. For to my apprehension, it is very near an absurdity that any one should come forward into the ministry of the gospel, and never seriously and candidly inquire whether it may not be his duty to engage personally in

this service. What are the words of the commission under the authority of which you are expecting to act as ambassadors of Christ? Open the sacred document and read. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." These are not instructions to missionaries merely; but the decree by which the gospel ministry was instituted. They are the credentials of every minister. By them is he authorized to hold his office. And what is the idea of his office which they imply? Not merely that of a pastor, who settles down for life to take care of a parish a few miles in extent. Not merely that of a professor of theology who devotes his life to training up those who are to preach the gospel. Not merely that of a domestic missionary, who goes forth to build up the walls that have fallen down, or have never yet been erected. Not merely that of a foreign missionary, who expatriates himself that he may carry the gospel to the heathen. It embraces us all together, under the broad seal of a single commission. An idea sublime in the expansion, within which it embraces such an extent of space, and such a variety of subordinate duties; and beautiful in the unity with which it brings all to bear upon the one great object, the conversion of the world.

What a narrow, one-sided view of this grand idea have they, who see in their commission nothing to create the suspicion that it may be their duty to go abroad. They forget that the object for which the church is organized, is not so much the maintenance of fortresses already taken and garrisoned, as for universal conquest. And what are they but commissioned officers in this great army? Was ever an officer in Napoleon's army,

with which he would fain have subdued the world, commissioned with the understanding that he was of course to remain at home? His very acceptance of office was a pledge that he held himself in readiness to obey orders, wherever they might direct him to go. And what does your acceptance of office, under the great Captain of salvation imply, other than that you will lead up to the conflict whatever part of the army he may direct? Your very entrance into the ministry implies a promise that you will go to the ends of the world, if your Lord direct. The offer of one who gives himself up to a missionary society, to be sent to China, or Palestine, or wherever they see fit, is not more absolute. Am I wrong? Then the ministerial office loses in my estimation much of its dignity and honor. Am I right? Then how inconsistent are they who enter the ministry, and never candidly entertain the question, whether the Lord may not be directing them by his providence to enter the foreign field.

But my object now is not so much to urge the missionary work upon you, as to help you in the inquiry, whether you are qualified for it. In doing this, I shall be led to claim so many high qualities in the missionary character, that I feel, that being a missionary myself, I ought at the outset to apologize for what may seem to some like arrogance or vanity. A word of explanation will suffice. You know that we often perceive most distinctly what we *ought to be*, when some painful experience shows us what we *are not*. This principle will be called in to aid me on the present occasion. And if I shall at all succeed in the model I am about to sketch, it will be because I shall not hesi-

tate to draw liberally from the experience of my own faults.

Proceeding, then, with my subject, I will say, *FIRST, the work of missions requires* A CHARACTER WELL DISCIPLINED BY A THOROUGH EDUCATION.

By education, I mean that training of the mind, and also the elementary knowledge of most branches of science, which are furnished by the most thorough courses in our colleges and theological seminaries. The faculties thus acquire a just proportion and an even balance, that fit them to act correctly and with effect in all circumstances. In my opinion, this *general* training of the mind, carried as it is among us to the extent of an introduction into all the branches of science, preparatory to the study of any of the professions, is far more conducive to soundness of public opinion, and to the interests of truth, than if particular departments were entered earlier, and pursued more exclusively. By selecting a certain study early, and devoting himself wholly to it, the German scholar does, indeed, succeed in pushing his investigations farther than any among us. But can you rely upon his opinions? Take him out of his own department, and you will often find him possessing hardly a school-boy's knowledge of other subjects. Hence he is wanting in that practical sense of the general fitness of things, which would check the wildness of his speculations by showing their inconsistencies.

Now, if there is a man on earth who ought to be trained under these enlarging and adjusting influences of a well proportioned education, it is the missionary.

He has to act in circumstances to which he was before an entire stranger, and for which he could of course make no specific calculation. And how can he be prepared to act with safety, except by having a foundation laid so broad, that it will serve for whatever superstructure he may need to build upon it. I do not say he will have use for half the facts he may learn. But he will need all, and more than all, the discipline of mind the acquisition of them will give. He will have to cope with prejudices and superstitions, hydra-headed in their variety and tenacity of life; to adapt himself to a state of things different from all he has known before, often the very opposite; and to shape the mould in which is to be cast the religious, and sometimes the civil and domestic character of nations. And for such emergencies, is not a mind required whose machinery is so perfect and compactly adjusted, that no jarring can derange it, and no disturbing force drive it from its track to the ruin of all who are moved by its power? I know of no station, occupied by a minister of the gospel, that requires a more complete education than that of a missionary, unless it be the station of those by whom missionaries and ministers are themselves educated.

The missionary candidate should go through the same course of study as the candidate for the sacred office at home. He should neglect no one exercise at college, or the seminary. Indeed, I consider it a great advantage which our country has, that it furnishes from its colleges and seminaries a sufficient number of missionaries, without the necessity of special institutions for their education. The financial advantage is con-