

THE MISSIONER

THE EDITOR

WE picture the missionary as a rather special type of priest, one who travels from parish to parish, armed with special weapons for overpowering the sinner and capturing him for God. The missionary, in the modern idiom, is a preacher who knows how to use the flames of hell and the never-dying worm to advantage where the heart is bent on self, but can turn towards the love and mercy of God when he recognizes a crack in the stony heart of his hearer. He may be a Billy Graham or a Herbert Vaughan, but he is always a very special type of man, prepared in a special way for his particular mission. The word 'missioner' has, too, been distinguished from that of 'missionary' which has also come to be limited in common parlance to a special type of preacher, one who travels to distant heathen lands to bring the Christian message to those who have remained until now in ignorance of the Gospel. The missionary moves in the virgin jungles of Africa while the missioner is found in the tangled, heathenized streets of the industrial town.

Faced with this restricted use of the two words which might otherwise have been employed for the universal duty of every Christian, we have of late turned to another term that hitherto had an equally specialized significance, that of the apostle. But although the modern Christian has gradually grown accustomed to the idea of the universal apostolate, the word 'apostle' quite naturally retains a restricted sense since Christ himself selected the twelve from among all his other followers and these twelve have been succeeded by the specially chosen and ordained members of the hierarchy.

We need a word that will effectively convey to every baptized Christian the fact that he has a mission, that he has received from the Holy Spirit powers that are not simply for his own sanctification. He has been sent to convey the grace of Christ to anyone and everyone who lack this gift that is essential to their life and happiness. It is in fact an obligation on every follower of our Lord to take the Gospel to those who have never heard it and to crack the hard hearts of those who have heard yet turned away in their

search for self. He has not received the full powers of the successor of the Apostles, neither has he necessarily been sent to foreign parts, nor yet need he acquire the tricks of the hell-fire merchant. Yet he must play his part as a living member of the Church which as a whole, as the Body of Christ, is apostolic and missionary. The mission of our Lord is unavoidably shared by those who follow him and one who refuses the obligation to be a missioner, a missionary or an apostle can no longer presume to call himself a Christian.

This missionary duty implies a firm foundation on Christ himself, an increasing grasp of the mysteries that are taught in a single Word, and a constant readiness to sacrifice self-interest and comfort for the sake of those who for any reason whatever know not Christ. The true missioner never preaches himself; he is not angered by attacks on his Church and faith because anger reveals a fear and a desire to preserve self against attack. This is perhaps one of the most difficult things for the convinced Christian to acquire. He is identified by the very life of our Lord with the Church, and yet he may so easily identify the Church with himself and try to draw it within the narrow limitations of his own life and points of view. The would-be missioner who unconsciously defends himself with wrath against attacks on *his* teaching or *his* practice will never prepare the way for the grace of God to convert others. 'There is no wrath in God', and the missioner must overcome his hasty temper and harsh words if he is to share in the work of God.

The only way to achieve this equilibrium is to turn from the little mound of self to the great mountain, the eternal rock that is Christ. The mountains which always appeared as the habitation of gods and spirits now stand as the permanent, unshakable sign of Christ established from age to age with none but surface changes, while the men and women of the world move around like the passing, formless clouds that so often conceal the heights. The Christian who stands on these heights has something other than his own convictions and opinion to support him. His faith that he seeks to impart to others is not a fabricated, humanly acquired judgment of what appears to him; it is a gift by which he surrenders himself to the unique truth, expressed in the single Word which was made flesh. This surrender implies the sacrifice of the most essential of man's human treasures, his freedom of judgment.

Truth like the mountain is before him, some parts appear to him and he can judge by his human faculties of their objective reality, but the whole is so vast and so high that he must accept without 'natural' evidence the truth uttered from the mountain top.

In practice this means a self-effacement that allows a man to be impressed by the truth of the Word instead of the man impressing his own words upon the moving reality around him. The desire of fallen man is to make his own world, to force his own muse which springs up from within him upon the outside world. But the one who stands on the rock of Christ is aware of the universe around him forming him, placing him where he is and so eventually sending him forth, formed anew by the divine powers. This is the beginning of the true missionary, when he has lost himself and found Christ, or rather when he has been by his own self-forgetfulness formed into the image of the Christ, the anointed mediator between God and man. Every Christian is thus formed sacramentally by Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. But so often he clings on to himself, he refuses to accept this 'death' of the Cross, he makes the doctrine his own, he turns dogma into his own opinion. In this he resists the inner power of the sacraments and refuses the mission. He weakly falls back on the distinction between lay and cleric in order to justify his refusal, closing his eyes to the fact that he is a member of the missionary Church, the Messiah yet on earth. These distinctions are well enough when it is a question of allotting different activities to different members, but it is unfortunate that the necessary insistence on the essential place of the layman in the Church has tended to separate him from the totality of the Church in his own mind. Essentially the mission of every baptized Christian is the same, to share with the whole world what it is impossible for him to contain within the limits of his own soul. Every Christian is a missionary, or a missionary or an apostle, whatever term we choose to employ. He has been given the Word, and the Word must be uttered, and the Word cannot be uttered until he has overcome himself. Pentecost formed the apostles when they had over a period of several years gradually abandoned their own idea of what the Messiah and the Kingdom of God should be. When at last they were given the full share of the Word they could stand forth before the whole gathering of men from all ends of the earth and call them BRETHREN.