

EASTER.

(Contributed)

The word Easter suggests to the mind at once a strange combination of poetry and religion, superstition and knowledge. It has a heathen, a Hebrew and a Christian reference which admirably illustrates the progress of human thought from the lowest materialistic religion to the highest spiritual concepts. We could say of the remarkable evolution which Christianity has wrought in the conception of Easter what St. Paul says of the influence of Christianity on human character and conduct in general,—“The old things are passed away, behold they have become new.”

If we should trace back the history of the religious festival which we celebrate every year on the Sunday following that fourteenth day of the calendar moon which falls upon or next after March the twenty first, we should note a most remarkable transition from superstition to knowledge, from a celebration of the festival of Ostara, the Teutonic goddess of spring to the greatest festival of the Christian year, observed in commemoration of the resurrection of our blessed Lord. In the childhood of the race as well as of the individual the human mind tends naturally to endow the phenomena of nature with divine or human attributes. Easter in its primitive form was a feast of the East. The Vedic Aryans were charmed by the East, and their poets sang of it as have the poets of all other peoples since the beginnings of literature. The return of light as the first streaks of morning appeared in the East was very wonderful and beneficent event. Lustrous and lovely were the beams that heralded the dawn, and the Dawn herself,—ever young, ever fresh, ever fair,—was a marvel that drew from the Hindu poets their strains of sweetest song. The old Vedic lines to the dawn maiden around our sympathies still.

“The lissome heavenly maiden here,
Forth flashing from her sisters’ arms,
High heavens’ daughter now is come
Filling the sky, thou openedst wide
The gates of night, thou glorious dawn
Rejoicing run thy daily race!

The heavens above thy rays have filled,
The broad beloved room of air
O splendid, brightest maid of morn.”

The dawn aroused the religious consciousness of the old Aryans, and gradually acquired a spiritual significance as the precursor of the returning sun who changed the darkness into light and death into life. Homer sings of the rosy fingered Eos, Virgil sings of blushing Aurora dragging her golden chariot across the morning sky. Shakespeare of “yon gray lines that fret the clouds as messengers of day”; but the Hebrew poet sings more beautifully than them all of lifting up the wings of the morning and flying away with the swiftness of the light to the uttermost part of the sea. And our Teutonic ancestors, being impressed by the sun which came forth in spring time with renewed vigor in his daily path from the east, putting a cloak of life on the dead face of nature, set apart a festival for the worship of *Eastera*.

The Hebrews did not deny the east or the dawn as most of the other peoples have done, and therein has appeared their religious genius. Their superior spiritual insight recognized a distinction between God and nature, and between God transcendent over the world and God imminent in the world. The Hebrew poet recognizes Jehovah as a spiritual person under whose immediate intuition and control the whole universe exists and from whose presence he cannot escape even with the wings of the morning. The Hebrew religious consciousness clashes on this point with the ignorant superstitious nature worship of the heathen. The Hebrew reference then in the word Easter is a mere chance coincidence, and in no way does it countenance the idolatry or the nature worship of the heathen. Animal sacrifices were being offered to *Eastera* at about the time of the Jewish Passover, and the name became attached by association of ideas to the Christian festival of the resurrection, which happened at the time of the Passover; hence we say *Easter day, Easter Sunday*, but very improperly as we by no means refer to the old festival once kept to the goddess of the ancient Saxons. Yet it is possible to see a fanciful analogy between a feast celebrating the spring of nature into new life after a kind of living death, and a feast celebrating the deliverance of a people from a captivity which was to them a living death. Easter is a joyous time of transition from

bondage to freedom, from darkness to dawn, from superstition to knowledge, from sorrow to happiness, and from death to life; and the Hebraistic idea of God has wrought a great change in the heathen conception of these things.

The Christian festival of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the commemoration of a historical fact born witness to by no less than ten different parties of eye witnesses who were persons of unbiased motives and unimpeachable character. This fact is freighted with ideas of the profoundest spiritual import, and our celebration of it is not opposed to but a culmination of the celebration of the Jewish Passover. It is the celebration of a deliverance from a spiritual oppression which is the worst of all oppressions. The resurrection of Jesus proved his final conquest over our last enemy death. Every seed that is planted in the earth dies before it springs forth into newness of life, so these bodies of ours which are sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption. The fact of the resurrection which we celebrate at Easter time submits itself to our senses, and almost necessarily kindles the imagination to explore the unseen world; and seems to overcome the main difficulties in the way of Christian faith. Reason is not left to struggle with the horrors of the tomb. The assurance that Jesus Christ who lived on the earth, who died on the cross and was committed a mutilated bleeding frame to the receptacle of the dead, rose uninjured, and then exchanged an earthly for a heavenly life, puts to flight the sad auguries which rise like spectres from the grave, and helps us to conceive, as in our present weakness we could not otherwise conceive of man’s appointed triumph over death.

DEPARTURE OF MR. & MRS. SMITH.

A representative gathering of the Christians belonging to the American Mission field was held at Tellipally on Saturday the 9th inst. Proctor Changarapillai, J. P., presided. An address was read which we give below in full and a watch presented to Mr. Smith as a token of the esteem in which he is held by the people. After some short speeches by prominent men, several songs were sung very nicely by three children, and the meeting terminated with thanks to the Chairman.

Miss Mary Smith, her sister and brothers left for Chavagcherri that same evening, to take the coach on Monday. Mr. Smith accompanied them as far as Chavagcherri, and on Sunday a union communion service was held when the members of Chavagcherri, Nunavil and Varany churches were present. After the service “goodbyes” were said, and the congregation dispersed. The next day a number of them gathered together and presented Mr. Smith with a purse containing Forty rupees.

Mr. Smith returned to Tellipally Monday evening and together with Mrs. Smith left Jaffna on Friday the 25th in S. S. “Lady Gordon”. They leave for Europe in S. S. “Ornuz” on Tuesday next, April 5th.

The address was as follows:—

Rev. and Dear Sir,

As you are about to visit America on a well-earned holiday, we the members of the American Mission Church in Jaffna, Ceylon, among whom you have laboured profitably for about 27 years, have met together to pay you our grateful tribute for your meritorious services rendered towards the cause of the moral and religious elevation of our country. On an occasion like this it is impossible to enumerate all your distinguished acts, which have made us permanently indebted to you, yet you will permit us to refer to a few of them.

In the educational department your well-directed labours have produced very good results. You made it a point to study the different Codes prepared by Government from time to time and your thorough acquaintance with the rules of the Department of the Director of Public Instruction, has made you sufficiently qualified to regulate the educational system of the Mission agreeably to the Codes. In no period of the Mission history, have the vernacular schools flourished so well, as they have during your management.

The Tellipally Training and Industrial School, which was practically established by you in 1878 and which has flourished under your fostering care, will be a monument of your skill and enterprise and of your desire to benefit the country. We know how much time and labour you bestowed in founding this institution at a time when technical education was unknown in the Island, and under what adverse circumstances you have had to work to raise it to its present status.

Permit us, sir, to publicly acknowledge that your work in connection with the Auxiliary Bible Society, the Tract Society and other institutions, has been of inestimable value and we shall always gratefully remember the interest you took in them and the sacrifices you have, at times, made of your personal comforts in doing your duties.

Your ministrations in the pulpit have always been acceptable to the hearers and profitable to their spiritual

well-being. We may here add that you took active interest in making several of the churches self-supporting.

We cannot let this occasion pass without referring to your estimable lady, who has worked with you during the whole period of your labours. We do not use a formal panegyric when we say that she was always devoutly fond of doing good work for her Great Master amongst our women and children. Her earnest addresses have conducted very much to their spiritual advancement and we sincerely hope that her example will stimulate many to follow her methods and adopt her work. We take this opportunity to thank your daughter, Miss Mary Smith for the very useful work she has done in the Training School.

Sir, we have one request to make of you. You are well aware that the evangelical work done by the agency of the American Board in our colony has borne good results. We beg to submit that it is a mistake to suppose that the labour bestowed has not been an encouraging labour. Much has been done to which we are sincerely grateful to the Board, but there is much yet to be done. We alone are unequal to the task. We need your leading and support. Therefore we beg of you to press our cause and to represent to the Board the urgent necessity of continuing its work here in Jaffna and of not withdrawing its missionaries or its grants-in-aid from the field.

It now remains to ask you to kindly accept the accompanying small but sincere gift as a token of the esteem in which we hold you. We fervently wish that God may give you, your wife and family a safe voyage to America and you may return to your sphere of labour after a happy sojourn there.

We remain Sir,

You, a dear friend,
T. C. Changarapillai, J. P.
S. E. B. B. B.
S. F. G. Carpenter
Samuel Veerasamy
V. E. D. Tillipally
Committees

CORRESPONDENCE.

To SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS,
166, Bow Bazar Street,
Calcutta.

1st. March 1898.

Dear Mr. Editor,
Allow me Mr. Editor please to state the following facts in the hope that an interest may be kindled in our Examination Scheme for 1898.

Auspices.—The India Sunday School Union will conduct a Scripture examination on Saturday, July 23rd, 1898.

Eligible Schools.—The examination will be open to all pupils of Sunday Schools affiliated to the Union, or its Auxiliaries. Conditions of affiliation may be learned from Secretaries of Auxiliaries; in most cases the only condition is that Sunday School statistics be furnished annually to the Auxiliary Secretary.

Subject.—The subject of the examination will be the International Sunday School Lessons for the first half of 1898, all of which are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Divisions.—There are four Divisions:

- I. Senior for candidates of 18 years and over.
- II. Middle " " from 13 to 18 years.
- III. Junior " " under 13 years.
- (The age to be reckoned on the day of the examination.)
- IV. Viv. Vo. for candidates unable to write the answers.

Teacher's Examination.—This is a new department. There will be a special set of questions for Teachers, to whom Certificates and Prizes will be granted according to marks gained.

Questions.—The Questions for the Junior Division will be such as can be answered from the passages of Scripture named. For the Middle and Senior Divisions there may be Questions on points of Geography, Manners and Customs, &c., but the chief importance will be given to the passages of Scripture selected and references thereto.

Examination in English.—An Examining Board will prepare English Questions and examine the answers.

Examination in the Vernacular.—Examines will be appointed for each Division in each Vernacular.

Certificates.—We will grant a third Class certificate to those who obtain 40 per cent., a second to those who obtain 50 per cent. and a first to those who obtain 75 per cent. of the marks. Maximum obtainable: 100. The answers may be in English or the Vernacular.

Prizes.—We offer a prize to each of the three who score the greatest number of marks in each Division, and in each language, in the First Class.

Subscriptions.—To the Prize Fund will be thankfully received and will be acknowledged by post and in the “Sunday School Journal”. Such Subscriptions should be sent to our Treasurer, H. S. Cashman, Esq. 19—1, Bow Bazar Street, Calcutta.

Further information.—All correspondence in reference to this examination should be made with

Yours truly,

R. BURGES.

FOREIGN NEWS.

Africa.—There has been fighting in the Soudan and the rebels are retreating. British troops are pressing forward, and the distances are soon likely to end.

Turkey And Bulgaria.—Turkey is moving large bodies of troops to the Bulgarian frontier, and the latter are greatly excited. Russia has sent a strong warning to Bulgaria to refrain from hostilities with Turkey.

India.—The war in the north west has ended, and 70 hostages have been taken.

The plague still continues. On March 19th and 20th there were 322 deaths; on the 22nd there were 181 deaths. The total number for the week ending on March 23rd was 1,250 including four Europeans. The cost of the plague for 1896-97 is Rs. 4,200,000. For the same period the famine cost Rs. 14,240,000 and the earth quake Rs. 5,200,000.

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