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RAJAH BROOKE AND MISSIONARY EFFORTS.

(From the Times.)

Sir James Brooke in his speech at Liverpool describes the present aspect of the whole question of the conversion of the world to Christianity with austere—some persons will perhaps think with discouraging and frigid, truth. "With the Mahomedan you have made progress, with the Hindoo you have made no progress at all: you are just where you were the very first day that you went to India." He does not think this arises from want of Christian zeal for conversion. Had there been ten thousand times more zeal than there has been, had there been even the zeal of the primitive Christians, or even Apostolic zeal, he does not say but that the case would have stood exactly the same. You cannot do this work, he says, by power of will. "It is not any sudden flood of zeal that will do it now more than zealous men have done it before." There is much latent Pelagianism in our Exeter-hall rhapsodies. These orators practically think that man can convert the world to Christianity: that if men will only be zealous enough, if they will thoroughly and with all their strength will the conversion of India, Turkey, and China, it will be achieved. It is only want of zeal, want of knowledge, want of money, &c., that prevents it. We do not mean for an instant to deny zeal, or to say that there is enough of it; but we think that Rajah Brooke has hit upon a philosophical aspect of the case when he says that this is not all that is wanted, and that perhaps what is wanted may be something which it is out of our power to supply. The truth is, we do not know all the causes which are in operation on this subject. Conversion is on the one side a matter of simply human means and appliances,—a matter of argument and persuasion; you go to Hindoos, talk to them, lay evidences before them, show them what falsehoods there are in their own religion, and appeal to their reason and conscience; all this is human machinery, and perfectly intelligible. On the other hand, the whole of the impediment to their conversion is not known to us; we cannot fathom the depths of the heathen state of mind, or get at what there is at the bottom of it,—the latent assumptions and subtle general principles which never came out in actual expression. Conversion is thus on the one side a known phenomenon, on the other side a mystery. We do not know that all the obstacles which stand in the way of the conversion of the world are capable of removal at present, or could be removed by any amount of those means which we have at our own command. There is nothing, then, to scandalize us in the view taken by Sir James Brooke. Conversion is indeed in one small corner a work actually going on before our eyes, but, looking to the whole field of existing heathenism, conversion is an idea rather than a work,—an idea which lies at the bottom, indeed, of Christianity, and lies close to the common heart of the whole Christian body,—an archetypal idea which may from its own strength be said to prophesy its own fulfilment, but still an idea only. It is a theory and a calculation rather than a work in actual progress. The work exists in the artist's head, the design is there, the pattern was "showed on the Mount," but the means by which it is to be visibly embodied, the machinery, the scaffolding,—everything for the erection of the fabric, is impeded, and the work is standing still from the operation of some deep, silent causes, which we cannot fathom.

The Rajah goes on to tell us that, extraordinary and unlucky as it seems, the very growth of Christian converting zeal seems only at first to strengthen the antagonistic religion, and to strengthen it, moreover, not simply upon a principle of obstinacy, but by really bringing out whatever power and reality it has within it. He illustrates this out of his own experience in Borneo. There "in exactly the same proportion as the Christian has been earnest the Mahomedan has been made earnest too. When there were only half-a-dozen Christians in the country, when their devotions were necessarily in their own houses and in private, there was no Mahomedan mosque at all. You never saw a Mahomedan say his prayers; but directly our church arose and the bell rang to give warning that service time was come, directly our services were attended upon, up started Mahomedan mosques; five times a-day did the Mahomedans pray, and the large drum on which they beat at service time was sounded." Here is a difficulty, for it would appear at first sight that Christian zeal only rebounded upon itself and gave strength to the very cause which it wanted to weaken. What is to be done when your own activity fights against you? The answer which is given, and which we believe is a true answer, is, that ultimately the pious heathen will come to the tether of his own religion, and will find when he arrives at a certain point that it does not satisfy all the cravings of his spiritual nature. Thus, if action breeds counter-action on one side it does the same on the other. The Christian creates a difficulty for himself when his own zeal only elicits the power of the antagonist religion, but that religion also brings about its own extinction when it raises its disciple just to a point at which he becomes dissatisfied with it, and finds that he has been improved only to discover that he wants another guide; but in the meantime the cause of Christianity waits, and waits long, while this intricate web of missionary diplomacy unravels itself, and this process of action and reaction comes to an issue. The rude aboriginal Dyak, Sir James says, is comparatively easily converted, because he has no religion to begin with, and, therefore, wants one of some kind, if only in self-defence against the Malay. The Malay has a great advantage over him at present in having "a book," in which it is written that the Dyak "shall be turned into firewood after death." This disagreeable prophecy he brings down upon the Dyak, who, inasmuch as he has no "book," can neither retort upon the Malay, nor even simply shield himself. The Dyak, then, wants "a book," and, hearing that the Christian has one, he comes to him for it, for the simple convenience of protection, and to remedy the at present highly disadvantageous position of things, according to which the Malay who murders his wives and children and makes a slave of him is certain of salvation, while the Dyak, who is the sufferer by all this violence, is certain of perdition. If he can come up to him on this temporal stage, he will, at any rate, be his match in the invisible world. But the Mahomedan Malay has already his "book," and does not feel this want. He meets the Christian with a revelation of his own, and "book" confronts "book."

We commend Sir James Brooke's remarks on conversion to the consideration of the orators who mount the platform of Exeter-hall. Without diminishing their zeal, his speech may still supply them with an aspect of the subject on which they do not often reflect, and which will perhaps even be new to some of them. These speakers are full of pious disclaimers of man's powers, and talk of "God's good time;" but it is evident that their imagination rests wholly and exclusively on the human visible means of conversion, and that they seldom, if ever, think of the invisible side of the subject—those deep, latent causes which are not within our knowledge, and with which we cannot deal. They do not think of the history of the human race as a mystery, and one of the greatest of mysteries, or of the rise, growth, and continuance of those great historical religions which stand outside of Christianity, as being to us a dark enigma. All is plain and easy to these gentlemen. Yet, if they reflected with any seriousness upon these striking and solemn facts, they would begin to suspect the snug completeness and compactness of their own view. They would become charitable even if they lost self-confidence. They would gather that when such vast effects exist there must be causes in operation which we have not reached; that we cannot pretend to have mastered all the arcana of the heathen mind, as formed upon these old religions, and that till we do we must look upon ourselves as to a great extent converting in the dark. It may be quite right to be sanguine as to an ultimate future, quite right to make use of all present means; but it is not right to forget our ignorance and necessary blindness on this and many other questions.