

## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction to 1927 Edition*

#### I

Many years ago, my experience in China taught me that if our object was to establish in that country a church, which might spread over the six provinces, which then formed the diocese of North China, that object could only be attained if the first Christians who were converted by our labours understood clearly that they could, by themselves, without any further assistance from us, not only convert their neighbours, but establish churches. That meant that the very first groups of converts must be so fully equipped with all spiritual authority that they could multiply themselves without any *necessary* reference to us: that, though, while we were there, they might regard us as helpful advisers, yet our removal should not at all mutilate the completeness of the church, or deprive it of anything necessary for its unlimited expansion. Only in such a way did it seem to me to be possible for churches to grow rapidly and securely over wide areas; for I saw that a single foreign bishop could not establish the church throughout the six provinces, over which he was nominally set, by founding mission stations governed by superintending missionaries, even if he had an unlimited supply of men and money at his command. The restraint of ordination to a few natives specially trained by us, and dependent for their own maintenance and the maintenance of their families upon salaries provided either by us or by the small native Christian community, and the absolute denial of any native episcopate at the beginning, seemed to me to render any wide expansion of the church impossible, and to suggest at the very beginning that there was something essentially foreign about the church which demanded the direction of a foreign governor.

The years that have passed since that early experience, and an examination of our missionary work in other lands, have

tended more and more to confirm that impression. I find that many of our missionaries are inclining to take the same view, and that the enunciation of it is often welcomed. Many are beginning to perceive that we cannot establish a foreign church governed and directed by foreigners, and then at some moment say: 'Let us make it indigenous or native by process of devolution.' If the church is to be indigenous it must spring up in the soil from the very first seeds planted. One or two little groups of Christians organized as churches, with their bishops and priests, could spread all over an empire. They would be obviously and without question native churches. But if we establish missions rather than churches, two evil consequences, which we now see in greater or less degree everywhere, sterility and antagonism, inevitably arise.

If the first groups of native Christians are not fully equipped to multiply themselves without the assistance of a foreign bishop, they must wait upon him, and progress will depend upon his power to open new stations, or to provide superintending missionaries. That way lies sterility. If the first groups of native Christians are not fully organized churches which can multiply themselves, but must wait upon a foreign bishop to move, they are in bondage. For years, perhaps, for generations, they must accept this bondage; indeed neither they nor their foreign leaders may feel it; but sooner or later they must awake and then I do not see how they can fail to feel resentment. If I were an Indian, or a Chinese, or an African, I should resent most bitterly the attempt to establish the Faith in my country by men who took it for granted that they must control and direct our spiritual life and progress. I should resent most bitterly the domination of foreign bishops and superintending missionaries. I should say:

They taught us that orders are essential to the church, they taught us that bishops are necessary for the administration of orders, but they insisted that a bishop must be a dignitary with a large stipend, and they insisted that we were not sufficiently educated to be bishops. At rare intervals they ordained some of us, but they never put us into a position to consecrate

our own bishops. Thus they kept all spiritual authority, in their own hands. Why should all spiritual authority be vested in them? They cannot claim that they are following the apostles in this: they cannot claim that they are obeying a command of Christ. They are simply in bondage to their own traditions; for they must know that we cannot advance without bishops of our own.

However noble they were in character, however considerate in action, however gentle in manner, I should still feel this. No church councils would satisfy me; nothing but a native episcopate, nothing but spiritual authority for unlimited advance would satisfy me. Consequently I am not surprised when I hear that nearly everywhere in our missions there is springing up a feeling of discontent at our domination; for I myself, who am neither Indian, nor a Chinese, nor an African, feel it to be wrong.

The equipment of small native congregations of Christians with full power and authority as local churches would remove most, if not all, of the present causes of trouble. We should cease to talk of a native church as something to be attained after long years, or generations of probation. There would be native churches at once which all men would recognize as native. There would be ample opportunity for the ablest and strongest native minds to exercise all their powers in the direction and advancement of the churches. Without further words we should have proved to all men that we do not preach Christ in order to extend our dominion as our enemies assert: we should have proved that we really mean the words which we now too often use without any demonstration that we really know their meaning – that we desire to be helpers, not lords over other men's souls.

## II

It is scarcely possible to make any statement about our missions which someone will not be found to contradict. Statements of fact are constantly made, and repeated again and again in our missionary magazines, without any question being raised, so long as the conclusion implied or expressed is that men should

subscribe more liberally to meet present urgent needs in the familiar way; but if they are used to raise a question concerning the wisdom of our missionary policy or practice, they are disputed. Consequently it has been a question of some difficulty, to decide how far it is necessary to support my statements of fact by references or quotations. To have added references and quotations in support of every statement made would have been tedious and absurdly lengthy. I have taken the proverbially risky middle course, and quoted at what may appear to some unnecessary, length on points which seemed to me of great importance, as for instance in my treatment of the subject of the training of a native ministry, whilst for matters of less importance in my eyes, or on points which critical and observant readers can find scattered freely in missionary magazines, I have contented myself with a single reference or with none at all.

There is another difficulty which besets anyone who would write of missionary methods in general terms: it is not easy for him to find any expressions which are universally true, or any rules which have no exception. The result is that the moment he makes any statement some individual arises to cry out that that statement is not true, because in his experience it is not true in his district; and thus an impression is produced that the statement in question is a gross exaggeration and that the author is a careless manufacturer of hasty generalizations. Sometimes this charge is made in ignorance of the facts even in that particular district. I remember a man of wide experience telling me that he discussed with a certain missionary the sense of grievance at their subordinate position felt by native mission workers. The missionary, answered him: 'Thank God we have not that difficulty here,' yet the first native whom he met when he left the missionary's house began at once to pour forth that complaint. I think that in regard to my earlier books I have been fortunate in that I have suffered much less than I expected from this sort of criticism, but I have not escaped, and could not possibly have escaped from it wholly, and I cannot hope to escape from it now. I can only ask my readers to believe that I have not written anything carelessly; I can only ask them to remember that the district with which they are familiar is not the only district in the

world; I can only ask them to pay heed rather to the essential principles than to the particular details; remembering that a crop of fruit does not all ripen on one day, and that if they did not see the ripe fruit in their district it may be because it has not yet come to its hour. The seed which produced the fruit may be there, and it is into the character of the seed which they are sowing that I ask men to inquire, that they may not be taken by surprise when the fruit appears.

A very able and distinguished missionary who kindly read this book in manuscript objected that I talked too much of 'tendencies'. He said: 'You are always saying that something *tends* to produce something else.' That is exactly what I mean. I try to point out that certain seed must produce certain fruit, and I illustrate by saying that the fruit from that seed has appeared in this place or in that. That surely is what I ought to do, if it is my object, as it is, to persuade, as far as I can, my readers to avoid planting one kind of seed and to plant another in its stead.

### III

I ought perhaps to say one word on the plan of this book. I begin by trying to set forth the nature of the force which issues in spontaneous expansion and the dangers of checking it. Then I point to some hesitating attempts in modern days to recognize and give place to it. Then I set out the difficulties which hinder us from giving place to it, the terrible fears which beset us, fears for our doctrine, our moral standards, our ideas of civilised Christianity, our organization. In doing this I argue that such fears are real and natural but wicked, that the standards which we so highly prize are not our Gospel, and that the attempt to maintain them by our control is a false method.

Spontaneous expansion must be free: it cannot be under our control; and consequently it is utterly vain to say, as I constantly hear men say, that we desire to see spontaneous expansion, and yet must maintain our control. If we want to see spontaneous expansion we must establish native churches free from our control. I would ask my reader to keep ever in mind this fundamental truth, and to remember that when I speak of churches I am not thinking of pseudo-national churches, national

only in name, but of local churches, like those rounded by St Paul, churches fully established with their proper ministers. If my reader does not bear this in mind, I fear that he will utterly misinterpret all those chapters which deal with doctrine and morals and organization and read them as though I was dealing with these questions in themselves. It is only in relation to the spontaneous expansion of the Church that they have any place in my argument. Finally I attempt to suggest a way of escape from our present position.

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