

IRISH CHURCH MISSIONS.

Adjustment to New Conditions.

THE annual report of the Irish Church Missions, presented by the secretary (the Rev. R. Mercer-Wilson) at the seventy-eighth anniversary of the society, observed at the Hoare Memorial Hall of the Church House, opens with "a note of deep thanksgiving for a truly remarkable year in the history of the society. There has not been such an influx of inquiring Romanists and interested Protestants for at least thirty years." Reference is made to the weekly "controversial meetings" held each Tuesday evening, to lantern services, the visitation of fairs and markets, and of back streets, indoor meetings, open-air meetings, the varied work on behalf of children, and the medical mission work at Limerick.

New Forces at Work.

With regret the Committee notify the resignation of the secretaryship by Mr. Mercer-Wilson, on the acceptance by him of the post of Lecturer in Ecclesiology and Church History at Wycliffe College, Toronto. They place on record their high appreciation of his invaluable services to the society during the past five and a half years. The report refers also to the visit paid to Australia by the Rev. T. C. Hammond, the Dublin superintendent of I.C.M., on the special invitation of the Vickery Trust. Mr. Hammond travelled by way of Canada, where, at Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, he had the opportunity of serving the cause of the society. In Australia, he lectured at Moore College, Sydney, and Wycliffe College, Melbourne. Adelaide, Bendigo, and Geelong were also visited. During his journey Mr. Hammond met many old I.C.M. scholars and converts. Several auxiliaries were established in the Commonwealth. By way of conclusion, the report says: "New forces are at work in the Emerald Isle—forces which make for freedom; and the result is seen already in the lessened influence of an obscurantist Church. The spirit of superstitious fear and craven bondage no longer holds the soul of the Irishman to the same extent as before. Is the new measure of release from sacerdotalism, with all its cruel tyrannies over human life, to issue in good or evil? The only answer that will avail is the answer of the Apostle. More men and women must be found, and their help enlisted in the cause, who can say 'Our sufficiency is of God.'"

Great Principles.

Major Richard Rigg, presiding at the afternoon meeting, commented briefly upon the report, and then went on to say that the Irish Church Missions stood definitely for the support of the great principles of the Reformation settlement—one of the greatest events in our national history. They stood for God's written Word and for justification by faith, and they stood against the implications of Transubstantiation and of Confession to a priest. "As we look out upon the history of the world," he said, "we find that the countries which have attained to greatness have been those associated with Protestant principles. This Empire of ours has been largely built up upon the principles of the Reformation; that is the way in which we have become a great people."

Impressions of the Emerald Isle.

The Rev. H. W. Hinde said he had just returned from his first visit to Ireland, and he had been very glad of the opportunity of becoming acquainted at first hand with the work of the Irish Church Missions. The first impression of which he wished to speak was his consciousness that in going to Ireland he had passed out of a Protestant land into a Roman Catholic country. That is a fact which impresses itself upon a Protestant visitor in a multitude of ways. The habits and customs, the minds and thoughts of the people are obviously dictated by their Church. The atmosphere is Roman Catholic; the pictures in the shops are of that type which one naturally associates with the Roman Catholic mind. Then there is the presence, and position, and power of the priesthood, and there is also that obvious poverty which is no uncommon thing in Roman Catholic countries. The second impression noted by Mr. Hinde was that the Irish are a religious people. There is a desire for God and a feeling after Him which is pathetic to witness. Thirdly, he was convinced the people were reachable, and that they may be won to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Mr. Hinde said it was his privilege to be present at the Mission Church in Dublin when eleven persons (six men and five women) were solemnly received into the Church of Ireland. He was greatly struck by the demeanour of these people; they had all been brought by one means or another under the influence of Gospel teaching, and obviously they were persons thinking for themselves and acting under a sense of great seriousness and sincerity. In the open air, also, Mr. Hinde was greatly impressed by the attentive and earnest way in which the crowd listened to the proclamation of the Gospel message. This one thing came home to him more than any other—that here were a people who were in darkness, feeling after God, and needing to know the truth; and he was very glad to add his word in support

of the work of the Irish Church Missions. "I feel," he added, "that we have come to a time in its history when we are approaching a real crisis in this work of evangelising the Irish Free State. Let us do what we can to strengthen the work of the I.C.M. and add to the number of its workers."

A New Phase of Existence.

The Rev. T. C. Hammond began a stirring address with a word of warm appreciation of the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Hinde. "I do feel increasingly," he went on, "that Irish Church Missions are gradually entering upon a new phase of existence. That, of course, is characteristic of every really live society. The Irish Church Mission is not moribund, nor is it going to die, notwithstanding that our funeral has been announced many times over! We have survived the great shock of the political division of Ireland, and we are now adjusting ourselves to the new conditions." Mr. Hammond then enumerated the three arguments levelled against the Irish Church Mission by its (obviously Irish) opponents—(1) There are no converts; (2) the converts they have are no good; (3) they all go back to Rome when they die. It had been his privilege to welcome three hundred converts who had come out from the Church of Rome. They did not deny that there were godly souls in that Church, but they did claim that there was a lower standard of veracity and a lessening of individual responsibility and independence where the influence of that Church was paramount. "It is not because we have been successful that we make our appeal to you to continue to support us. What we say is, if the Reformation really means anything, if the open Word and direct access to God mean anything, then our position is clear—we cannot but speak out the things of which we are assured."

The afternoon proceedings were brought to a close by Mr. Michael Madden, a burly Irishman, speaking with an Irish brogue not always easy for English ears to take in, telling in picturesque yet straightforward fashion "Why I left the Church of Rome."

A Big Religious Debt.

Mr. Albert Mitchell, speaking from the chair at the evening gathering, said that England owed a big religious debt to Ireland; in the first place, because men from Ireland played a considerable part in the evangelisation of England; and in the second place, because of the blunder made at the time of the Reformation. If the duty of Englishmen to Ireland had been properly and tactfully fulfilled at that time, we should not have seen in these days a people in Southern Ireland so largely under the domination of a foreign Church. The proper way to pay that debt back was by the positive proclamation of the truth of the Gospel.

Mr. Hinde once more commended without reserve the work of Irish Church Missions, "Every branch of the work," he declared, "is deserving of our fullest confidence and our sympathetic support." The closing address by Mr. Hammond was even more stirring and moving than the one he had delivered in the afternoon.