

SHORT SIGHT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The following has been handed to us (*Lyttelton Times*) for publication :—

DR. SCHWARZBACH'S REPORT.

To the Secretary of the Board of Education of North Canterbury.

Christchurch, March 2.

Dear Sir,—according to my promise, I hand you herewith the result of my examination of the sight of the pupils attending the Normal school in Christchurch. The object of this examination was to ascertain the percentage of short-sight amongst the school children. The result may prove important for the purpose of future comparison. I found, at the said school, amongst 431 girls 27 cases, and amongst 367 boys 22 cases of short-sight, more or less developed. Through the courtesy of the head mistress of the Girls' High School, and of the head master of the Boys' High School, I examined also, in the former, 115 girls (19 cases of short sight), and, in the latter, 84 boys (8 cases of short sight). From my detailed report on ophthalmic data connected with New Zealand, and compiled for transmission to a scientific journal, I make the following short extract:—Out of the 998 pupils examined in Christchurch between the ages of 7 and 18 (the period where a faulty refraction of the eye begins to develop itself more readily), I found 75, or 7½ per cent, of the total number suffering from short sight, there being among 451 boys 31 cases, and among 547 girls 44 cases. A more detailed result may be gathered from the following figures:—The degree of short sight is expressed in fractional form, after Snellon's method; for instance, 20/30 implies that the eye can only recognise objects at a distance of 20ft., which are to a normal sight recognisable at 30ft. In like manner 20/50 signifies that objects are distinguishable only at 20ft. which should be at 50ft., and so on.

923 possess good sight, or	...	20/20
41 have sight represented by	...	20/30
14 do do	...	20/40
9 do do	...	20/50
4 do do	...	20/70
2 do do	...	20/100
2 do do	...	20/200
1 do do	...	15/200
5 do do	...	10/200

If we take from the above the 41 cases represented by the figures 20/30 (a degree of short sight not very strongly developed, which with increasing age often rectifies itself) we find that amongst the 998 pupils there are only 34 cases of a marked character, 11 of them being of a serious nature. From the above statement it must not be inferred that the remaining 923 children are all possessed of entirely normal sight. Some are far sighted (hyperopic) and a few weak sighted (amblyopic). Of these I give no detail, my object being to ascertain the extent of that modern disease—short sight, which has spread throughout Europe with giant stride. The given percentage (7½) is a low figure as compared with short sight in English schools (16 per cent), and in German schools (26 per cent). In Sydney, where I made similar examinations at the desire of the Board of Education of New South Wales, I ascertained 10 per cent. The more rural life of the children of New Zealand, and especially the excellent manner in which the windows are arranged in the Christchurch schools, are probably the cause of the rather favourable result of my researches.

Allow me, dear sir, to express my thanks to you, and to Mr. Rayner, head master of the Normal School, for facilitating my investigations.—I remain, yours obediently,

B. SCHWARZBACH, M.D.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE DARK CONTINENT.

(*Bombay Catholic Examiner.*)

At a time when the colonization or conquest of African territory by one or other of the great Powers of Europe is fast becoming the universal topic of discussion, it may not be uninteresting to learn something about conquests of another order, and to cast a glance at the progress which the standard of the Cross is making upon the soil of the Dark Continent. In our efforts to do so we are assisted to a certain extent by a late number of the *Missions Catholiques*, in which the writer of a cursory sketch of the development of the Catholic faith in all parts of the world devotes a not uninteresting page to what has been and is being done towards the spread of Catholicity along the coasts and river-basins or across the plains and deserts of the vast Continent, to which recent explorations have attracted so much attention and so much hunger after territorial annexation. It is consoling to learn that, however neglected in the past—although in many parts of Africa are to be found indelible traces of past missionary labours and evidences of the zeal for Catholicity which once animated European Governments, Catholic now only in name,—there has been within the past few years a signal revival of missionary energy, and that the voice of the genuine apostle has been heard where before it had never spoken or had long been silent.

To begin with a portion of the Continent which lies contiguous to European seas and skirts the shores of the Mediterranean, we are reminded by the bare mention of the name of Cardinal Lavignerie of great and solid work which has been done, aided of course by French encouragement and protection, for the extension of the Catholic faith. The great missionary Prince of the Church has so far succeeded in his labours as to have erected within his Tunisian diocese a cathedral, an episcopal residence, a hospital and a college; he has covered the newly acquired territory of Tunis with schools, parish churches and asylums for sufferers of every kind, and has won for himself and for his colleagues the deepest respect of men of every creed and race among whom his lot is thrown, whether French,

Italians, Maltese or Arabs. He has done more; for while reorganizing the ancient Church of Carthage he has educated and equipped bands of zealous missionaries, some of whom have already bent their steps towards the Great Lakes of the interior or are hastening to do so under the leadership of Mgr. Lavinhac, the first bishop who has been given to the Church by the newly founded Society of the Algerian Missions.

In close proximity to the field of labour where these Algerian missionaries have begun the work of evangelization may be found the Jesuit fathers of the Zambesi, the zealous labourers in a mission which was founded, as we are told by the *Missions Catholiques*, by Father Depelchin, himself a Belgian but well known in India, and we may also add both known and highly esteemed here in Bombay. Though now at home in order to recruit his health weakened by many hardships, the work which he began continues to be carried on with all the energy and self-denial of those by whom it was some years ago commenced. To designate it as a work of self-denial hardly expresses its real character; it has been one of terrible hardship and danger, as is shown by the fact that no fewer than fifteen missionaries, ten priests and five lay-brothers, have already succumbed to the deadly nature of the climate, to unforeseen accidents or to disease or exhaustion, the results of their own unremitting labours and privations. Still the work goes on, and the chronicler of these deeds of heroism encourages us by holding out the strongest hopes that a firm and solid foundation has been laid on which to build hereafter the edifice of a flourishing mission.

The Jesuits of the island of Madagascar expelled from the scene of their labours partly through hatred of the French name, but still more by the unprincipled bigotry of traders under the name of missionaries who, we regret to say, have their head-quarters at London, are next mentioned by the writer, who classes under the title of African Missions such as are or have been carried on in the great and fertile island, the possession of which has for centuries been anxiously but vainly sought by successive Governments of France. Heedless of the ambitious views of his countrymen and desirous only of winning it to Christ, the French missionary has been far more successful than the French politician. A large and flourishing Mission until very recently furnished strong evidence of this success, and would have done so still but for the relentless war of sectarian spite, which, with its long train of dastardly outrages, as has been already described at some length in our columns, brought ruin upon the labours of long and toilsome years. For the expulsion of the Jesuit fathers who are now awaiting at Tamatave the opportunity of returning, which may some day be accorded them, sympathy with the French was but the flimsy pretext; its real cause was sectarian hatred of the Catholic faith.

Omitting Egypt and British territory in South Africa for another occasion, the *Missions Catholiques* next describes the progress which our religion has made upon the western shores of the Continent. Here it has had great and almost insuperable difficulties to contend with, arising less from climate or the hostility of the heathen than from impediments cast in its way by Protestant missionary societies. Competition with the latter would of course be, what at present it is not, a mere trifling task, and the truth could achieve an easy victory over transparent falsehood, were it not for an ally of no small power which is actively engaged on the side of heresy. We need hardly say that the mainstay of Protestant Missions is money and little else. Aided by German and English gold the propagators of heresy have established for themselves comfortable quarters at every trading station, and through the same means have induced large numbers of the natives to assume the name of Wesleyans, Methodists, Baptists, etc., as the case may be. Such a medley of designations would be likely to mystify the aborigines did they take the trouble to inquire into their meaning, which of course they do not, being amply satisfied with the material advantages to be gained by calling themselves Protestants. Hence we are not surprised to learn of the multiplication of so-called Protestant Missions along the coast. Thus at Sierra Leone there are establishments of twenty different sects, all flourishing in ease and comfort; on the Gold Coast Methodists abound, while emissaries from Basel, the only ones who are said to do useful work in the matter of education, are to be found at Accra and Popa. At Lagos, in the delta of the Niger, a Protestant negro Bishop, Dr. Crowther, has his headquarters; while as everyone knows, Liberia, a republic made up of the descendants of slaves set free in the United States, is Protestant after a fashion.

But in spite of obstacles such as those above mentioned the heralds of the true faith are rapidly making their way. The energy and self-denial of the Catholic Missionaries have begun to win for them respect even in Protestant Liberia, while in the French settlement of Gabon, at the mouth of the Ogowe, as well as in the interior among the Adoumas, their missions are in a flourishing state. The voice of the truth is once again heard where it had long been silent on the banks of the Lower Congo, and through the assistance given by M. de Brazza the Fathers of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost have established themselves at Loango and Linzolo, while by the same Order centres of Christianity are being formed in the region of the Upper Zambesi. Not to dwell longer upon the spectacles presented by Western Africa, it may be mentioned that nowhere has greater activity been displayed than by the French Society of African Missions appointed in 1880 by the Propaganda to evangelize the Gold Coast, which has furnished to the Church a band of most ardent and zealous workmen. Among these Père Moreau has especially distinguished himself, having already in so short a space of time, and aided by only three confreres, succeeded in establishing a flourishing mission together with churches and schools already crowded with pupils.

To speak of the clergy and the nuns of the Soudan, overtaken as they have been by the horrors of a fanatical rebellion and for more than two years held captives by the Mahdi, is a painful task. Long ago we heard of the death of some among their number and of the sufferings endured by others. Further conjecture is at present useless, and the tragic termination of the siege of Khartoum, of which we