

Te Kaha Pastorate	3 0 0
Te Puke Mission District ..	*
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*Not received at time of going to press. Will be acknowledged in next issue.

Our Goodly Heritage.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation."

Just before the Lord Jesus went up into Heaven, He gave this command to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," a command still strongly laid on His Church, for alas! though more than 1900 years have rolled by since He uttered these words, there are yet quite half of the inhabitants of this earth who have never even heard of the mighty Saviour Who has redeemed them. If we cannot go out personally as missionaries we must do our utmost in other ways to help the Church to carry the message of love to the heathen that they may be turned from darkness to light, or else we are neglecting to obey this our Lord's last command.

Nowadays it is no easy task to convert the heathen, but in the Apostles' time it was far more difficult.

The Romans were then masters of the whole known world, and you must remember that their punishment for the lowest sort of criminals was crucifixion, as degrading as hanging is with us. Yet the Creed of Christians is to believe in a Crucified Saviour and to glory in the Cross; and this was what the Apostles had to tell these proud conquerors.

How they would mock!

Remember, too, how sunk in wickedness the nations were then. No one was ashamed of leading an impure or selfish life; sin was openly committed by rich and poor.

No hospitals were to be seen anywhere, for the sick and old. It was Christianity that built them later.

Human life was counted very cheap. Men, women and children were bought and sold and became the property of their owners, who might ill-treat them, or put them to death as they liked. It will give you an idea of how they were treated when I tell you that three kinds of property were recognised—the "speaking, the half-speaking, and the dumb." You will hardly guess what these three meant.

The "speaking" were the slaves, the "half-speaking" were the animals and the "dumb" were tables and chairs and such-like furniture!

It was Christ Who showed that the slave was equal with his master in being created by God, and made in His likeness.

Very cruel were people then, not only with their slaves, but in every way. To see human suffering was an excitement and pleasure, and the chief amusement of Rome, the greatest city in the world, was to watch gladiators or professional fighters kill each other in the Colosseum, as their gigantic theatre was called, or wrestle with the savage lions or leopards until they were torn to pieces.

To such men as these, the Gospel of peace, and goodwill, and forgiveness was to be preached.

How could the Apostles—how dared they—preach it?

They could, and they did, with marvellous success, too, but only by the help of that Holy Spirit Who is ever with the Church.

A few years afterwards, when the awful persecutions began, their converts proved by their steadfastness how thoroughly they had accepted the Crucified One as indeed the true Son of God, their Saviour. For this Faith they were ready to give up all that the world holds pleasant and lovely, and even to lay down life itself.

The first persecution was, of course, that which followed the stoning of St. Stephen, but it did not go beyond the land of Syria.

Roughly speaking, there were ten general persecutions before Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire under the Emperor Constantine.

God's "noble army of martyrs" did wonders for Him at these times. Bishops, slaves, grey-headed men, men and women, strong lads and quite little children, died painful deaths for love of Jesus.

St. Symeon, the second Bishop of Jerusalem, was 120 years old when he was crucified, while St. Cyriacus had barely reached his third summer when the cruel prefect of Tarsus ended the short life by dashing him on to the stone pavement of the judgment hall.

In those days Christians were made the scapegoats on whom the blame for every calamity was laid; whether earthquake, famine, plague, or war, they were said to have caused it, and were at once hunted out so that the discontent of the mob might be visited on them.

The Emperor Nero declared that his great persecution was to punish the Christians for having set fire to Rome. Of course they had never done such a thing; indeed, it was commonly whispered that the Emperor had

himself caused the conflagration on purpose; that he might rebuild the city on a more magnificent scale.

On this occasion the martyrs' clothes were soaked in pitch or oil, then they were placed on pedestals in the Imperial Parks, and at a given signal were set on fire, so as to illuminate the walks with living candles. In a far deeper sense than Nero ever dreamt of, they did let their light shine before men!

Other tortures were also devised, such as wrapping Christians in the skins of wild beasts, and then throwing them to savage dogs to be worried to death.

St. Peter and St. Paul both suffered martyrdom under the Emperor Nero, a monster of iniquity, who had dared to murder even his own mother.

I must explain here that the Romans, as a rule, tolerated the religions of the countries they conquered, and even built temples for them. Why then did they so fiercely persecute Christ's followers?

Well, one reason was that they could not understand the largeness of Christianity. It was not the particular religion of one State or people. "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" was, and is, the Creed of every true disciple of Jesus, in whatever part of the world he may be living.

Now, Catholic means Universal—for everybody, for king and slave, for black men as well as white. This perplexed the heathen, and their rulers thought that Christ's Church was a secret political club which might become dangerous to the Government and therefore must be suppressed.

But the chief reason why Christianity had to bear the full fury of the oppressor, was because the Church's voice gave no uncertain sound on the subject of idols; she declared boldly that "they be no gods which were made with hands;" and that all who joined her must utterly renounce idols, and worship the One True Living God.

So over and over again, the gigantic might of Rome, the mightiest nation, save our own, that the world has ever seen, was hurled against Christianity, but to no effect. The Church cannot fail, for it is the building of the Holy Spirit, and Christ is the Head Corner Stone.

Instead of being stamped out the Church spread more and more.

In the 1924-1925 Government estimates we note an item "Salvation Army—£1000." It does not appear whether a Government grant is to be made to other religious denominations to further their work, which is similar in character to that of the Salvation Army. Why?