

BOOK REVIEW OF:
*ALEXANDER ROBB, THE HEATHEN WORLD AND THE DUTY
OF THE CHURCH (EDINBURGH 1863)*

By Duane Alexander Miller¹

This is the sort of rare gem one finds in the lower-level stacks of an old library like that of New College, the School of Divinity of Edinburgh University. Reading such venerable volumes can teach one a lot about the state of Christian mission—where it was at a given period of time, and what sort of discourse was being employed by churchmen at the time.

Alexander Robb, a missionary in Nigeria, presents his church of the time with a forceful and passionate argument for mobilizing missionaries and supporting the work. He, The Rev. Alexander Robb, deals with the normal questions that missionaries today still face: why support mission work when there are few converts? (God is sovereign, we don't see fruit sometimes because we'll get proud, etc.); what is the relation between commerce and mission in the (then) age of empire? (Let them each go their own way); is there possibility for salvation for the heathen without the Gospel? (Even if there is, we should act as if there is not).

It is a short little volume, and on the whole he does a good job of providing answers that even today seem, well, let's say less stale than other missionary texts of the mid-19th century. On the negative side, he starts the book with a catalogue of the inhumane vices of the heathen. It all seems a little overblown, but later on he strikes a balance by insisting that these are indeed human beings made in the image of God. One wishes for a little more sympathy and willingness to find positive aspects of the heathens' cultures, but Robb doesn't see much there.

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