

## CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND EUROPEAN POLITICS IN CHINA.

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THE reference which Lord Salisbury, in the speech which he pronounced at Exeter Hall, made to the involuntary responsibilities incurred by missionaries as indirect causes of the Chinese revolt against Western civilisation, still continues to afford ample food for comment and discussion in the European press.

It would be impossible even for the most zealous supporter of mission work to maintain that Lord Salisbury's accusation is wholly unfounded. For missionaries in the Far East a certain amount of *push* and of self-assertion is a necessary condition to success, and one which Catholic missionaries, above all, take good care not to neglect. Even at the Paris Exhibition may be seen the gorgeous and really interesting pavillion of the Catholic missions, on the Trocadero, for these up-to-date apostles ignore none of the secrets of a modern *mise-en-scène*.

But far more interesting and important than the showy pavillion at the Exhibition is the magnificent Palace of the Propaganda at Rome, rising majestic over the Piazza di Spagna, for it is in this sombre and imposing building that all the complicated machinery of Catholic missions throughout the world is worked by able and ever-watchful prelates.

It was Sixtus V., that giant among Popes, who first conceived the idea of a separate and independent organisation for the purpose of spreading the Catholic religion to the uttermost ends of the world. Indeed the *Propaganda Fide* may be compared to a sort of ecclesiastical Foreign Office, whose duty it is to maintain friendly relations not between the Holy See and foreign governments, but between the Church of Rome and the faithful scattered all over the *orbis terrarum*, the number of which faithful it endeavors to in-

crease by every means in its power, regardless of sacrifices both of lives and treasure.

Long before this powerful institution for the spreading of Catholicism was founded, however, Catholic missionaries had pitched their tents in the vast empire destined to become the scene of endless labor, suffering, and glory to themselves and their followers for many centuries.

And it is to Italy that the honor of having first violated the mystery of the Middle Kingdom is due. As early as 1288 Father John of Montecorvino, of the Minor Franciscans, founded a mission in North Chi-li, not far from Peking. But even in those times the missionaries fared no better than they do now, and persecutions were both frequent and violent. Under the dynasty of the Yüens, Christianity was practically stamped out, and it was not until 1582, when the Yüens were driven from the throne, that the celebrated Jesuit Father Picci succeeded in re-establishing a mission at Peking.

The famous emperor, K'ang-hi, allowed a wider scope of action to the Italian missions, which were thus enabled as early as 1688 to extend their jurisdiction into Mongolia, Manchuria, Schan-tung, and Corea. An era of rapid progress then began in all the provinces of the Celestial Empire. It was not before 1783 that the French commenced to work by means of the priests of the missions, more commonly known under the name of Lazarists, who soon began to compete successfully against the Italians, converting to their own advantage the pioneer work so successfully begun by the latter. Up to 1860, however, the Italians could still be considered as sole masters of the missions, as they far outnumbered any other nationality.

But when the present deplorable conflict between Church and State arose, the Vatican began to seek the support of foreign powers, with the result that the Italian missions in China underwent a veritable disaster. At a moment when funds became more urgent than ever, in view of the ever-increasing activity of the missionaries of other nationalities, the Vatican suddenly withdrew its support from the Italian missions, whose place was gradually taken by newcomers. Although the Holy See has often protested that the question of nationality has nothing whatever to do with mission work, still it is a well-known fact that the Vatican has done everything in its power to support French influence in the Far East. For it is France, the *fille aînée de l'Église*, that the Vatican has always recognised as holding a protectorate over all Catholic mis-

sions, of whatever nationality, in China, in the same manner as Austria-Hungary, by an equally ancient privilege, claims the right of protection over the missions in Egypt.

But while Austria-Hungary has never taken advantage of her rights, France, on the contrary, has systematically made use of her protectorate over Catholic missions for political purposes. Indeed it cannot be denied that France owes her present strong position on the shores of the Mediterranean and in Tunisia to her missionaries, and more especially to Cardinal Lavigerie.

As recently as the 22nd of May, 1888, the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide formally reasserted this privilege of France in the circular letter *Aspera rerum conditio*. "It is a well-known fact," says this document, "that for many centuries past the French Protectorate has been established over the East, and that it has been confirmed in the various treaties with other nations. No change whatever must be introduced in this matter, and wherever the protectorate of this nation is established it must be religiously respected by the missionaries, who, when in need of help, must turn to the French consuls or other agents of the same nation."

It cannot be denied that France has enjoyed the privilege of protectorate over missions in the East for a long time, when the conditions of Europe were very different from what they are at present, but this privilege conferred by the Holy See on the "eldest daughter of the Church" has never amounted to a positive right, for the simple reason that, contrary to the affirmation of the Propaganda Fide, it has never been recognised by international treaties or in any way sanctioned by diplomacy.

The French government and the Holy See interpret the Treaty of Paris of 1856 in their own way when they assert that this privilege, first granted as a reward to St. Louis and to his brave knights, was reconfirmed and sanctioned in homage to so ancient a tradition. Besides, the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 contains an article (art. 62), which stipulates that "the rights acquired by France are expressly reserved, and it is understood that no change be introduced in the *status quo* of the Holy Land." But here too while mention is made of the Holy Land there is no allusion to Syria or to China which might warrant the extension of French privileges to those regions. As a matter of fact, therefore, no European nation has ever consented to recognise the privilege conferred by the Vatican on France, and the Emperor William II. not long ago openly rebelled against the strange pretension that Ger-

man missionaries should divest themselves of their nationality to embrace the French. It will be remembered that the occupation of Kiao-chou was justified by the Emperor as an act of reprisals for the murder of two German Catholic missionaries in Shan-tung. William II. appreciates at its full value the enormous political influence wielded by the humble missionaries who start from the Propaganda Fide, and he has lost no time in declaring both to France and to the Vatican that the German missionary, of whatever denomination he may be, shall always travel under the protecting wing of the German eagle. With his quick diplomatic perception the Kaiser has immediately understood that the missionaries placed by the Vatican under French protectorate accomplish the same rôle which is fulfilled by those politico-religious ministers who have been christened in Europe "the Jesuits of England's colonial expansion," and therefore persists in turning a deaf ear to the protests of the Vatican, which would have France alone as the protecting genius of the missions in the East.

That the missionaries, to whatever nationality they belong, carry on a beneficial and highly important propaganda for their country, is now an undeniable and well-known fact, and this being the case, it is not surprising to find them under the accusation of being more or less directly concerned in political events.

It is interesting to learn what a Catholic prelate, Mgr. Luigi Piazzoli, Bishop of Hong-Kong, who was recently interviewed by the *Osservatore Catholico* during a short stay in Milan, had to say on the subject: "I cannot deny," began his Lordship, "that there is some truth in the accusation brought against the missionaries of having indirectly caused the present troubles in China. But theirs is an indirect, a very indirect, responsibility. There was a time in which the missionaries were held in the greatest consideration and esteem and were almost beloved by the Celestials. For instance, in one of the squares of Peking there stood a statue to Father Matthew Ricci with the inscription *Li-ma-to*, meaning Grandee of China. But in those times the missionaries were not hampered with the protection of European powers. For the important point of the question lies here: the missionaries ought not to be *protectea* by anybody! They are and should always remain voluntary victims, men ready to sacrifice everything. By being protected they lose their prestige and gain nothing. Formerly they died the death of martyrs, now they are killed merely because they are Europeans. The protection of the powers merely serves the latter as a pretext to acquire a firm footing in the Celestial Empire every time that

some missionary is killed or ill-used. The consequence is that the Chinese have come to hate the missionaries; they no longer consider them in the light of ministers of a religion, but as spies charged with preparing the ground for the invasion of the *foreign devils*. Now you will understand why I said that the missionaries are *indirectly* the cause of the present revolt against Europe.

“But the real direct cause of the trouble is that the Chinese will never forgive the Europeans for having established themselves in their ports and for gradually acquiring an undeniable influence almost amounting to dominion over their country. And they can never forget or forgive the profound difference which separates the manners and customs of the two races. It was madness to hope that we could win them over to our civilisation by means of railways and cannons. Besides, it must be owned that the specimens of European civilisation down there are not always as edifying from a moral point of view as might be desired. I repeat that the only chance of gradually winning China for Western ideas lies in the patient, slow, peaceful work of the missionaries, of the missionaries left wholly to themselves. Everything has been spoiled by this political interference. You see that the Chinese are now murdering their own countrymen whom they suspect of having been hopelessly corrupted by the missionaries, of being Chinese no longer. The Catholic edifice raised up stone upon stone with such infinite patience by thousands of martyrs during a long vista of centuries is now threatened with utter destruction. When will it be possible to set foot again in China? And will it not be necessary to begin the whole work over again from the very beginning? Oh! it is sad, believe me, it is a very sad prospect.”

Mgr. Piazzoli did not deny, however, that many of the so-called converts to Christianity, especially in Canton, a city famous for its thieves and robbers, are not *bona fide* converts at all, but feign conversion merely in order to obtain better employment from Europeans and to carry on their thieving under more auspicious circumstances. Those scoundrels naturally throw discredit on the missionaries and contribute to increase the suspicion in which they are already held by the great majority of the Chinese.

All things considered, therefore, it cannot be doubted that those missionaries, the protectorate over whom is disputed by France and the other powers, all anxious to exploit them for their own political ends, have no small share in the tremendous load of responsibility which has brought about the present revolt of China against Western civilisation.