

CATHOLICITY IN CHINA

OUR MISSIONARIES' WORK

The invitation issued by the Chinese Government to the Christians of China, asking them to make the last Sunday of April a day of prayer for the nation, has been made the text of a multitude of articles in the English press on the position and prospects of missionary work in the new Chinese Republic (writes Mr. A. Hilliard Atteridge, in the *Catholic Times*). In hardly any of these articles has a word been said of, or the slightest reference made to, the position and progress of the Catholic missions. This is no doubt

The Result of Ignorance

rather than of any ill-will in the majority of cases. But it is strange that the enterprising newspapers of England should be so ill-informed. They have had much to say of the work done by the various Protestant mission agencies. Their silence as to the still greater results obtained by our missionaries is all the more remarkable. The Catholic missions of China are generally said to date from the sixteenth century. But though this is the fact, it is a statement that has to be explained and modified by their subsequent history. There are many Catholic families in China, especially in the Peking district, who are descended from

The Converts Made by the Early Missionaries.

But in the latter part of the eighteenth century the suppression and dispersion of the religious Orders in Europe, and the disorganisation that followed the French Revolution, cut off the supply of missionaries for the Far East, and whole districts had to be abandoned. Left without priests or churches many of the native Christian families lost the inheritance of the faith. Some remnants of the old harvest of the Chinese missions were preserved, but when in 1830 the work of reconstruction began again, much ground had been lost. The wonderful results obtained in China are really the fruit of about eighty years of apostolic work, carried on with very limited resources, and for many years in the face of persistent hostility from the authorities. Further difficulties arose from the frequent civil wars and outbreaks against the foreigners, which often wrecked in a few days the work of many years. But progress, slow at first, had been more and more rapid and encouraging, and the single Vicariate Apostolic, or missionary Bishopric, founded in 1830, has now developed into a system of

Vicariates and Prefectures Apostolic

covering the whole of China. There are 39 of these Bishoprics, and including Coadjutors, there are 49 Catholic Bishops in China, besides those of Manchuria, Tibet, and other outlying provinces. Before giving the general statistics of the Chinese missions it will be useful and interesting to note the varying fortunes of the work in a typical province. Kiang-si is one of the inland, south central provinces. In 1832 there were 6000 Christians, mostly descendants of those of the old missions, but some of them recent converts—there were few missionaries and the people were mostly ill-instructed. In 24 years (1832-56) the Lazarist missionaries had reorganised the district and had 3000 more Christians under their care—9000 in all. In the next eight years the Taiping troubles devastated the province, and the number of Christians in 1862 was only 6000, the same as thirty years before. But in the next twenty years (1862-1882) the number rose to 16,000, and in forty years more the increase was beyond all hope. Last year Kiang-si, divided into three Vicariates, each ruled by its Bishop, had over 55,000 baptised Christians and 26,287 catechumens preparing for Baptism, in all over 70,000 Catholics.

The reader's attention must be called to the very large proportion the number of catechumens bears to that of the baptised Catholics. The same plan is followed that the early Church employed in converting the Roman Empire.

The Chinese Convert

is not admitted to Baptism until he has been for a year, or even two years, under instruction and probation.

He is taught Catholic prayers and practices, comes to the services of the Church, and all the while is being trained for the great change from paganism to Christianity. Only when he has been thoroughly instructed and tested is he given the privilege of Baptism and admitted to the other Sacraments. This ensures that the conversion is solid and real. If the Catholic missionaries would adopt the easy-going plan of recording as a convert everyone who would read a Bible, listen to a sermon and promise to come to church, they might easily increase their returns of converts—but they would not be building up a solid edifice.

Present Catholic Position.

Forty years ago we had in China proper 26 bishops, 697 priests, and 470,000 native Catholics. Since then local persecutions and the terrible Boxer outbreak gave the Catholic Church in China a multitude of martyrs, and here as elsewhere the blood of martyrs has been the seed of the Church. In 1912, on the eve of what we hope will be a lasting peace for the Church in China, these were the numbers:—Bishops, 49; priests (European), 1426; priests (Chinese), 701; total priests, 2127; native students for the priesthood, 1215; nuns (European), 1426; priests (Chinese), 701; total priests, 2127; churches and chapels, 5375; Catholics (baptised Christians), 1,363,697; catechumens (converts under instruction), 309,985; total, 1,673,682.

The Protestant Missions.

I have no general return of the Protestant missions of later date than 1905. In that year sixty-three different mission societies, representing several forms of belief, claimed a total of 178,251 baptised Christians, about one-seventh of the number of baptised Catholics. And the Protestant missions as a rule are content with much less evidence of reality in their conversions and dispose of abundant wealth for developing their mission system. The Catholics enjoy no such resources and the work of the missions is possible only because priest and bishop and nun are content to live hard lives of poverty, on less than the income of the poorest day labourer in Europe.

With scanty resources and largely with help given by their converts our missionaries have besides their churches built up schools, orphanages, hospitals, industrial training establishments, and the like. Educational work is represented by village schools at one end of the scale and at the other seminaries, lay colleges, and what may almost be described as a university at Zikawei, with its observatory, laboratories, museum, and vast library and printing press. All classes are represented among the converts. The Prime Minister at Peking is a Catholic. It would be easy to quote testimonies, Catholic and non-Catholic, to the zeal and earnestness of our Chinese brethren. The best proof of what sterling stuff they are made of was afforded by the way in which hundreds of them died for their faith during the Boxer outbreak.

The Fields White for the Harvest.

Many Catholics here at home seem to think that the triumphs of the Catholic missionary belong to a heroic past—to the days of such men as Xavier and Ricci. There is a strange neglect of missionary literature among us. Our missions do not advertise their work. At the last meeting of the Catholic Truth Society the complaint was made that there was very little missionary literature among its publications, and the reply was that it was not produced because it was not asked for. It would be well if something were done to create a demand, for on interest in the work depends the provision of ampler resources for the missions. What I have said of the results obtained in China shows how much more could be done. Here 'the fields are white for the harvest.' In less than a century the organisation of the missions has penetrated every province, and now that the time of difficult beginnings and frequent persecutions is over, we may hope to see in the present century the Church in China drawing millions into her fold. This is no over sanguine expectation, seeing that in eighty years the few scattered thousands of 1830 have grown to over a million and a-half in 1912.

R. V. C. Harris

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