

NEW CHINA AND CHRISTIANITY

The following summary of recent events in China, which has been contributed to *America* by the Rev. Father Kennelly, S.J., of Shanghai, will assist our readers to understand the position of affairs in that country at the present time:—

On April 17 the Chinese Cabinet met and decided that all the Provincial Governors and other high officials request the Christian communities and leaders of Christianity within their jurisdiction to join in prayer for the welfare of the nation. The Peking message communicated to all the papers and sent to the four quarters of the new republic ran as follows: 'Prayer is requested for the National Assembly now in session, for the newly established Government, for the President to be soon elected, and for the Constitution of the republic, begging that the present Government may be recognised by the Powers (Brazil, Cuba, the United States, and Mexico have so far recognised it; the other Powers still withhold their approval), that peace may reign within the land; that strong, virtuous men may be elected to office, and that the Government may be establishment upon a solid foundation. Upon receipt of this telegram you will notify all Christian churches in your provinces that April 27 has been set aside as a day of prayer for the nation. Let all take part.'

Such a request from a non-Christian Government was unprecedented. Never in pagan Rome were the Christians invited to pray for the State, its rulers and its needs. They were, on the contrary, only fit victims for the gladiatorial combats, the hardships of exile, and the ruthless cruelty of martyrdom. In China the Manchus likewise persecuted, exiled, and banished to the extreme limits of the Empire. Yungcheng, who ruled from 1723-1736, banished the Jesuits to Macao, except a few skilled in mathematics, who were kept at the court as astronomers. The Sacred Edict states clearly that this privilege did not in anywise imply that the Catholic religion was good. 'This sect,' it is there said, 'is unsound and corrupt, and the people must be prohibited from believing its doctrine or joining its ranks.' Then follows an exhortation to rank idolatry: 'Within the family were two divinities—the father and mother. Why should men go elsewhere to find an object of worship (sic) and pray for happiness' (*Chinese Repository*, Canton, 1832. Vol. i., p. 308). During his reign hundreds of churches were destroyed in the provinces and 300,000 converts left without their pastors. Under Kienlung (1736-1796) the persecuting policy continued and lasted till the end of his reign. The same attitude was maintained under Kia-king (1796-1821), and Taokuang (1821-1850), that is, for a period of well nigh 130 years. It was only in 1844 that the Catholic religion began at last to be tolerated. Churches were allowed at first to be built only in the five open ports (Treaty of Whampoa, September 24, 1844, Article 23). The missionaries had to wait till 1860 before they could legally penetrate into the interior of the provinces. France then obtained that the Catholic religion and Catholic converts were to be protected, that missionaries might live in the interior, erect churches there and open schools, rent and purchase property. It was also stipulated that all religious establishments confiscated in times of persecution should be restored (Peking Convention, ratified October 25, 1860; Article 6). Religious toleration has therefore existed only during the last sixty years, a short period indeed, and even during this time many efforts were made to evade the treaties. When the republic was established in the early part of 1912, Article 7 of the Provisional Constitution granted

Full Toleration in the Matter of Religion to All.

This was reiterated at various times both to Protestants and Catholics. During the course of 1912 and down to the present day the above policy has been faithfully maintained. In April of the past year General Li Yuan-hung, the hero of Wuchang, now Vice-President, is credited with having said to Father Murphy that 'Catholic missionaries were wanted to regenerate

China, and that they would be fully protected.' In July of the same year Yuan Shi-kai generously helped the Vincentian Fathers at Pastingfu, in the province of Chihli, to start an industrial school and establish workshops for poor children. About the same time the then Minister of Education issued a proclamation stating that in future the government would not give any special honors to Confucius. If Confucianists wanted temples and schools, they must build and maintain them at their own expense. No preference would be given to any of the three religions of the country—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism—in the public schools. This decision of the government raised intense opposition, some contending that Confucianism was not a religion at all, but a politico-ethical code of state-government, which had done good work in the past, but could now be dispensed with. Others maintained that it should be kept and state-supported, as it had given to China its national and individual character and has ever stood for knowledge and virtue. The Minister, however, was unmoved by these arguments and abided by his original proclamation.

In many places idol processions have been prohibited and the temples of the gods turned into schools and barracks or transformed into public halls. At Pichow, in North Kiangsu, a curious fact happened. The village elders were compelled to tear down a temple and employ the materials in erecting barracks. Before setting to work they offered the incense to the gods as the Chinese are wont to do, while the masons and workmen bowed reverently and pleaded superior orders. The poor idols were then placed outside in the rain and sun and told to wait until the inhabitants were able to build them new temples.

Some of the leading papers, especially in Shanghai, have more than once pleaded in favor of Christianity. 'The Christian religion,' says one of them, 'exercises a wonderful influence over the people. It teaches self-discipline, a virtue which is imperatively needed in a community where all are free to enjoy equal rights. It also inculcates uprightness and honor. When children are instructed in this progressive religion the advantages are incalculable. We are anxious that for the future welfare of China the religious point of view should not be over-looked in her national development.'

The Heads of the New Government Seem,

therefore, to show strong sympathy for the Catholic Church. Not only has toleration been proclaimed, but in many cases opportunities have been seized to do acts of kindness, help Catholic work and encourage educational efforts. Last year the government officially allowed the Aurora University, conducted by the Jesuit Fathers at Shanghai, to grant degrees to its students who had completed their course in Philosophy, Law, Science, and Arts.

It must also be acknowledged that the Government is possibly much impressed by the large and growing number of Christians. Catholics (baptised) reckon at present 1,431,302 (Father de Moidrey's figures for 1913), while catechumens under instruction and preparing to enter the Church are about half a million, thus aggregating a total of 2,000,000. As to the number of Protestant converts, the best and latest authority is the *China Mission Year Book* for 1912. Here we find the number of baptised converts set down as 324,000, or one-fifth of the adherents found within the Catholic ranks. It is a well-known fact that among Protestant missionaries in China Christianising efforts have partly ceased. The present-day efforts are almost exclusively along the line of educational and medical work. This is good indeed, but does not Christianise. Despite their large number of foreign missionaries and native helpers; despite also the abundant funds placed at their disposal by the Home Boards, they are far behind the Catholic Church in success and in numbers. Among the converts of both Churches, many Christians are prominent in political, social, commercial and other positions, and all classes are fairly represented in their ranks. It is therefore not surprising to see

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