

CHINA.

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MORE than 1,000 years before Julius Cæsar landed in England, the authentic history of China, as distinguished from the legendary, began to be written; but, until recently, we have known comparatively little of the Chinese, for the peculiarity of their customs, jealousy of foreign interference, and what we must call obstinate conservatism have set them apart in a strange world of their own, centuries behind, as well as centuries in advance of western civilization. The people who invented printing 470 years before the birth of Caxton, yet object to the introduction of railways, and look very shyly at the improvements in modern agriculture.

Can we gain any idea of the vastness of the empire by saying that if we laid the map of China upon that of the United States, it would not only cover it, but overflow into the Gulf of Mexico? The population of this great territory, moreover, is nine times that of the United States; roughly speaking, it is 400,000,000, of which gigantic figures we can perhaps form a better conception by stating that every third child born in the whole world is Chinese.

The first Christian mission to China was that of the Nestorians, in A.D. 637, of which, however, the only trace remaining is the celebrated tablet at Sengan Foo, signed by Adam, Pope of China, which records the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

In the 13th century, the Church of Rome sent John Monticorvini to China, who, during the first eleven years of his mission, it is said, baptized 6,000 persons. The Church of Rome has now more than 400,000 adherents. In the 16th century, a Jesuit mission to China was organized, but, as this society found it impossible here, as elsewhere, to keep from interfering with the politics of the country, it was suppressed.

The first Protestant missionary, Dr. Robert Morrison, was sent to China in 1807, by the London Missionary Society, but it was not till seven years later that he baptized his first convert, and at the close of his twenty six years of toil he had only ten. In our own C. M. S. mission at Fuh Chow, more than ten years elapsed before a single convert could be reported, and when we contrast this with the 6,000 baptisms of the first Roman Catholic mission we cannot but feel doubt as to the fulness of its instructions, and the genuineness of its conversions. But Protestant missions have, in actual fact, only a history of fifty years, for it was by the opening of the treaty ports in 1842, whereby foreigners could freely enter the empire, that they took their first firm stand on Chinese ground.

There are now thirty-four Protestant Missionary Societies at work, eighteen of which

are British, twelve American, four Continental, and the result of their united efforts brings the number of Protestant Chinese Christians up to 40,000, which means that out of every 10,000 heathen there is one Christian.

Of this not very grand total, 4,600 belong to our own C. M. S., which commenced operations in 1845, by sending the Rev. G. Smith (afterwards Bishop of Victoria Hong Kong) to start a mission at Shanghai. The Ningpo mission was begun in 1848, that of Fuh Chow in 1850, and in 1851 the first four converts of the two earlier missions were baptized.

In 1862 the Pekin mission was started by the present Bishop of Victoria, then the Rev. J. S. Burdon, and from these centres the work has gradually spread.

Until 1880, China was divided by the C. M. S. into two episcopates, North and South China, but in that year the former was divided into two, Bishop Scott of the S. P. G. being appointed to what is now known as the Diocese of N. China (which field the C. M. S. have now entirely resigned to the labours of the sister society), and the Rev. G. E. Moule being appointed to the See of Mid-China.

But mission work is not a thing of dates and numbers, rather of heroic, loving, human effort. Figures can give but the skeleton of it; and to gain some idea of its living, struggling, hoping, often despairing reality, let us glance a moment at some of the trials, difficulties and encouragements which group round the path of the missionary to China.

Earliest and most pressing of the former is of course the language. Can we at all realize what 50,000 characters mean, and how hard it must be for the missionary whose heart is on fire to preach, to have to sit patiently over his books, knowing that nearly two years must elapse before he can expect to stand as an intelligible teacher before the people? He tries in a hesitating way before this, but, as there are four or five tones to each sound, he can never feel certain that he is expressing the right idea; that when he intends to speak of a book, or of what is holy, he is not telling the people of water and a star, the words being identical, only the tones different. We are glad to hear, however, that the language is not so difficult as it seems, proved by the fact that missionaries do master it, and then come face to face with the actual work.

The present religious systems of China are not the principal obstacles to the reception of the Gospel of Christ. There are three state religions, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, but so intertwined are they that many are known to profess all three. In none of them is there a personal god which must be given up by the convert to Christianity, but he is asked to give up what is infinitely harder, his ancestors. Believing, as the Chinese do, that the