

Chinese Horrors.

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A good many of the clergy have used the "Pekin Massacre" as a theme for their more or less facile pulpit eloquence. It is so easy (and safe) to be indignant with the Heathen Chinee, for he is a long way off and cannot retaliate, and all the "Powers" in the world are down upon him. Besides, those wretched Celestials are so irritating. They have a civilization far older than our own; and although it is inferior in some respects, in others it is superior. Then again, they find their own religion good enough, and even better than ours. Sometimes they say that theirs is a religion for honest men, while ours is a religion for thieves and scoundrels, seeing that it promises heaven to the worst of men provided they "lay hold" on Christ at the last moment of their evil lives, and avail themselves of the virtue of his atoning blood. Now this is calculated to fill the average Christian, and especially the professional Christian, with boiling anger. Hence the present universal shout of execration. There are pro-Boers, because the Boers are Christians; but there are no pro-Boxers, because the Boxers are anti-Christians.

Canon Page Roberts, of St. Peter's, Vere-street, preached there on Sunday for the last time, before taking his holiday, and going into residence at Canterbury. Towards the end of his sermon he referred to the "great anxiety now felt as to the possibility or ghastly certainty of an awful crime having been perpetrated at Peking." Before such a crime, he said, we stood speechless—although he was talking about it. Such a crime, he continued, had few parallels in history. But is this true? Or is it one of those cheap falsehoods which modern Christian preachers are in the habit of palming off on ignorant congregations, who know next to nothing of history except what they have casually picked up in their random reading of magazines and newspapers?

If the European Legations have been murdered, it is an act of shocking savagery, a brutal violation of the immemorial law of nations. The worst barbarians are accustomed to respecting the person of an ambassador. He is a guest, and is therefore sacred. But the Legation buildings at Peking had been for some time heavily armed, and, being defended by European soldiers and sailors, they doubtless appeared to the fanatical Chinese as foreign occupations rather than embassies. Still, the crime (if really perpetrated) is a dreadful one. We do not seek to palliate it. And if all Europeans—women and children as well as men—have suffered the same fate, perhaps after the most sinister torture, in which the Chinese are said to be adepts; why, in that case, it is easy to understand, and hard to deprecate, the cry which is being raised for vengeance. It is at any rate necessary, at this time of day, that a nation like China should be taught that it cannot be allowed with impunity to murder wholesale and with deliberation the citizens of other countries who have a legal and recognized status within her borders; in other words, that a minimum of decency must be enforced upon all States in their international relations. That is right enough. But when a parson talks about this Peking massacre as having but few parallels in history, one is prompted to

hold up one's hands in amazement at the ignorance or audacity of the speaker. Why, there have been many far worse massacres in the history of Christianity itself. The Saint Bartholomew Massacre was infinitely worse. It involved the murder of more than forty thousand persons, it was planned and carried out by priests and statesmen, it was acclaimed and blessed by the Pope. A hundred other instances of Christian cruelty and bloodshed might be cited. Take the case of the Jews. Up to recent times they have frequently been massacred by the Christians in various parts of Europe. Prior to the reign of Edward I., when they were practically banished from England, not to return until the protectorate of Cromwell, they were often massacred in hundreds; and, on more than one occasion, they slew their wives and children to prevent them from falling into the hands of the cruel and lascivious Nazarenes; just as most of us hope that if the Chinese mob did overpower the Legations, the Europeans had time to slay their women and children with their own hands. When one reads of the sufferings of the Jews in Christian Spain, one is filled with an agony of loathing. The vilest smiling butchers in China could not possibly beat the cruelty of the Spaniard. Even in Protestant Germany the robbery, oppression, and murder of the Jews was simply diabolical. Their tormentors had nothing to learn of the Chinese in the arts of devilry.

Let us go back along the stream of time. Let us take the period of the later Saxon kings, the Normans, and the early Plantagenets. Cutting off the feet and hands of prisoners, amputating their noses, putting out their eyes, and even castrating them, were common occurrences. Yet England was then devoutly Christian. What she wanted was science and humanity.

Let us go back still farther. King Edwy, who ascended the throne of the Heptarchy in 955, fell in love with a beautiful princess called Elgiva. Had he made her his mistress, the clergy would have raised no objection. But he married her, and she was within the degrees of affinity prohibited by the canon law. Even that offence might have been overlooked if Edwy had been more humble and docile in the hands of the ecclesiastics, who were incensed at his independence. Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury, sent into the palace a party of soldiers, who seized the queen and burnt off the beauty of her face with hot irons. Then they carried her by force to Ireland, to remain there in perpetual exile. Being cured of her wounds, she tried to return to the embraces of her husband. But the Archbishop sent a party to intercept her. She was hamstrung, and she expired after three days of frightful torture.

Branding a beautiful woman's face, only because her husband loved her! Holding the hot irons against her seething flesh! Grim hate watching with zest the defacement of the loveliest of nature's productions! And then hamstringing this unfortunate woman—cutting the sinews of her thighs, and killing her by inches! Damn these Christian monks, and these priests of Christ. Yes, damn them. What milder language can a man use? Not a monk or a priest, but a *man*; one who reverences the living temple of maternity.

The fact is that the Christians, as Christians, have no right to be indignant at Chinese or any other horrors. The history of their own religion is too black with crime and red with blood. Even if the Chinese should hold white hostages, and carry out a threat to boil some of them in oil on the approach of the European army to Peking, they would only be tearing a leaf out of the torture-book of the Inquisition.