

Messenger and Visitor

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The Problem of China.

What are the causes and what will be the outcome of the present upheaval in China, are questions which, in view of existing circumstances, it is very natural to ask, and they are questions too which it is very much easier to ask than to answer. China is so great in extent of territory and in population, is so little known and understood by the people of our modern western world, is so different from all that we know in its government, its civilization—if civilization it can be called—its traditions and ideals, that it is not easy for us to acquire any definite apprehension of the ideas and forces which dominate the Chinese people, or to appreciate the influences which are most active in the present revolution.

There can be no question, however, but that the present situation in China, with its actual horrors and its terrible contingencies, may be justly regarded as an incident in the world-wide conflict between the old and the new. Hitherto China has known little of such conflict, because it has been the home and the stronghold of the old. Here conservatism has reigned with unquestioned right,—venerable, complacent and supreme. In the family and in the State, the past, and all that connects the present with the past, is regarded with a reverence that amounts to worship. In the west men think of their children; and the desire to make conditions favorable to those who are to perpetuate their name and their life in the world is a grand spur to effort. In China the faces of men are turned toward the past, and the controlling motive is to do honor to parents and to ancestors. The complacent acceptance of and the religious devotion to all that has formed a part of the long ancestral life of the nation has naturally begotten and fostered in the Chinese mind a strong antipathy and contempt for everything modern and foreign. In the view of a conservatism so profoundly complacent and so religiously rooted in the past as that of China, the very presence of men embodying the restless modern spirit is an offence, and any innovation upon ancestral ideas and customs by a Chinaman is an act of base impiety.

But it has become impossible for any people or nation to remain unmoved by the tides and currents of the world's life and thought. Even China can no longer maintain her seclusion and continue to dream on through other centuries as in the past. The rude, bustling modern world, with its steamships and its railways, its steam and its electricity, and all the enginery of modern industry and modern warfare, has been knocking at her gates and making such a hubbub in her ears that poor China's dreams are sadly disturbed, and she moves uneasily upon her couch, with indications of an awakening that may result uncomfortably for her visitors. Not a few of the sons of China have awakened to the fact that, while their country has been dreaming complacent dreams, the world has been moving. They have come to perceive that the new ideas and new methods count for so much more than the old, both in the field of industry and on the field of battle, that the nation which proudly ignores them must go down before the powers which she affects to despise.

Much has been done in recent years to widen the circle within which progressive ideas have found acceptance in China. This has come about by the education of many Chinamen abroad, by the diffusion of modern literature in China and by the influence of Christian missionaries. The war with Japan was a valuable lesson. It served to convince many of the more intelligent Chinese that in the matter of warfare at least China could no longer afford to ignore modern methods, and the results of this conviction are apparent in the effective resistance that the Chinese, equipped with the latest modern armor, are now able to offer to European forces. There had come to be a progressive party of considerable and rapidly growing influence in China. It had gained the favor of the young Emperor, Kwang Su, and it

had begun to look as if much might be expected from the working of the modern leaven in the Celestial Empire. But evidently the Progressives attempted to go too fast. The Emperor was not strong enough to give the movement adequate support and protection. Very naturally the old conservative and anti-foreign spirit of the nation was aroused, and the Empress-Dowager saw and seized her opportunity to appear as the representative of that spirit and to usurp the reins of government. The Emperor was accordingly dethroned, some of his liberal advisers were beheaded, while others escaped a similar fate by fleeing from the country. Following this *coup d'état*, and partly it would seem as a result of it, came the Boxer movement, in which the dull and unintelligent heart of the nation is expressing, through fiercely fanatical methods, its deep-seated antipathy to all change and foreign interference. Probably the Empress had not counted upon a popular demonstration of so terrible a character as that which her usurpation of the Imperial throne aroused, but whether she encouraged or discouraged the movement has not yet been made clear.

The opposition of the Chinese to the foreigners and their modern methods is not indeed wholly sentimental in character. In every country the introduction of labor-saving machinery has encountered popular opposition more or less strong, and on the same principle its introduction is opposed in China and in a more violent form. The people perceive that the general adoption of modern methods of travel, traffic and manufacture, will create great disturbance in existing economic conditions. Every railway and every factory that shall be built, they perceive, will deprive a considerable number of men of the employment upon which they now depend for the means of living, while to that class of persons the resultant benefits appeal but slightly if at all.

What the immediate outcome of the present situation in China will be, we shall not attempt to forecast, but it cannot be open to doubt that, in China as elsewhere, the future most belong to the party of progress. It is possible that for the present there will be some recession of the tide, and that the old conservatism may seem to intrench itself more strongly than before. But it is impossible that China can long shut itself out from the influences that are moving and moulding the world. The seed which has already fallen and rooted itself in the soil of China will not die. Gradually—or it may be more rapidly than we think—the change will come, and the people of China will yet be blessed with a Christian faith and a Christian civilization.

"These Little Ones."

The title given to the Bible lesson for next Sunday in the International Series—"Jesus and the Children"—cannot be said to indicate very correctly the significance of the passage to be studied. It is true that our Lord takes a child as the text, or rather as a living illustration, of his discourse. The discourse, however, is not addressed to children but to grown men—his disciples—who were moved by human ambitions which rendered their minds unresponsive to spiritual truth, and who had so utterly failed to comprehend the purpose and work of their Master that they had been disputing among themselves as to which of them should hold the positions of eminence in the Messianic Kingdom which they believed that Jesus had come to set up. We see how foreign their thoughts and their motives were to his. As Dr. Maclaren has said: "He was gazing on the cross; they were dreaming of and squabbling about thrones." The lesson of the passage as it comes to us now is not a lesson for children as such, but a lesson for disciples young or old,—for all who need (as who does not) to be instructed in the fundamental Christian grace of humility.

But there is here at least an incidental lesson concerning Jesus and the children. Jesus valued the child life. He loved the children and liked to have them near him. He did not turn away from them as being of little importance, and he rebuked such a disposition in his disciples. "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven"—are his gracious words,—words that have encouraged Christian parents always to bring their living children unto Christ, and which have ministered consolation to millions as they have committed their little ones in death to his keeping. And doubtless the children felt the attrac-

tion of that pure presence and that loving heart. When Jesus wanted a little child as a text or an illustration of his discourse, it was not far to seek, nor was it hard to persuade the little one to sit by his side or to resign itself to the embrace of his arms. And so it is still,—when Jesus is truly presented in word or in life to the children there is a response.

We should note that what our Lord commends to his ambitious and scheming disciples is not the innocence or perfection of the child life, but its humility and simplicity. These questions as to who shall be greatest are utterly foreign to the child's thought. It does not care for thrones. It cares for kindness, for fellowship, for love. It may be wilful and selfish, but it is never ambitious. It will as soon follow a peasant as a prince, and as a playmate, the cook's son is as acceptable as the duke's son. This simplicity and humility of the little child is the antipodes of that spirit which prompts men to seek place and preferment, to covet exalted position and lordship over their fellowmen. We do not suppose that the disciples of Jesus needed more than other men to be admonished against the indulgence of the self-seeking spirit. Rather the fact that this spirit was found so strong in men who had led so simple and humble a life as did those Galilean fishermen, shows how widespread and how deeply rooted in human nature the passion for lordship is. The teaching of Jesus and the life to which he calls his disciples runs directly counter to this innate principle of the human heart. His doctrine is that humility and self-sacrifice are the conditions of fellowship with himself, and that service is the measure of greatness. The disciple who has the true spiritual vision will discern in every fellow believer the likeness of their common Master, and in receiving him will receive the Lord himself.

When our Lord speaks of "these little ones that believe on me," it is not children merely that he has in mind; it is rather any true disciple, old or young, however humble and however weak that disciple may be. We see here what it is in his disciples that Jesus especially values and cherishes. It is not greatness of faculty, the power to do great things and win applause, it is the simplicity of faith that follows trustingly and gives itself wholeheartedly to the service of its Lord. To put a stumbling-block in the way of any such "little one," so that faith suffers shipwreck and the disciple is turned away from the service of his Lord, is a terrible thing. How stern is Christ's warning against causing his little ones to offend. And how sternly he would have his disciples deal with themselves, lest they permit something to turn them away from the true life of love and humble service toward God. Better—infinitely better—to sacrifice the right hand or the right eye than to be utterly and hopelessly lost.

Editorial Notes.

—Mr. Gladstone in his last years was troubled with a growing deafness which sometimes made it difficult for him to hear what was being said in the House of Commons or to follow a low-voiced minister in the service of the church. It is related by Dr. Cuyler that, one Sabbath in an English Chapel on the Continent, Mr. Gladstone had taken a seat near the pulpit, but soon complained impatiently to Mrs. Gladstone, who sat by his side—"I cannot hear him"; to which she in a tone inadvertently loud enough to reach other ears than those for which the words were intended, replied—"Never mind, go to sleep; it will do you more good."

—The man who has had the happiness to be well-born physically, and the wisdom prudently to husband his resources through youth and middle life, may look forward cheerfully to his later years, as "the last of life for which the first was made." Ex-President Dwight, of Yale, alluding to his having resigned his office at a time when his strength would seem to justify his continuing for years yet to occupy the responsible position which he had filled so well, said: "I lay down my office not because I am old—seventy is not old—but it is the end of the summer term, and vacation time has come. My theory of life has been this in just this regard: I believe that life was made just as much for one period as another,—childhood, prime and later life, and every man should prepare himself for the late afternoon hour, so that life may grow happier till the golden time—late in the afternoon. I look forward to coming years of greater happiness than I have ever known."

—The reports which come from China respecting the Christian missionaries there and their condition are in many cases as uncertain as the reports from that country respecting other matters, and one knows not what to believe. It is certain that many missionaries have been obliged to leave their stations and their converts and seek safety in flight. Even this is a great affliction. After making homes for themselves, learning the language, cultivating a mission field for years, with many prayers and arduous labors, and securing a few converts—then, just when perhaps it seemed that the fruit of prayer and toil was to be reaped, there breaks forth this