

The Situation in China.

BY THE VEN. A. E. MOULE, D.D.,

Rector of Burwarton-cum-Cleobury North; Missionary to the Chinese since 1861.

“IT is, of course, impossible to dogmatize without sufficient evidence.” So wrote our leading journal the other day, and thereby the writer seemed to do the very impossible thing which he condemns, for he appears dogmatically to assert what dogmatic persons can do or cannot do. If he had said what, presumably, he implies, that it is illegitimate so to dogmatize, that would be more to the purpose. For it is an age of dogmatism, and there has been so much of dogmatic assurance and vaticination on the subject of the present article, that people’s minds are much exercised by the almost complete falsification of these assurances. The extreme difficulty of realizing for oneself, and of assisting others to realize, the realities of the situation in China, arises in great measure, perhaps, from the very situation of the great land; and the reverberations of the thunderstorm now breaking and raging over China, always subdued by distance, are now rendered almost inaudible by the gusts and claps and glare of the storm of present danger and distress hanging and roaring over England itself.

Yet we *must* listen and must watch the barometer of China’s situation, dropping in one short year, as some seem to think, from set-fair, and their hope of a Christian revolution, to the stormy depths of reaction, and the alternatives of anarchy, or civil war, or relentless autocracy, or a constitutional monarchy, with a constitution well-ordered, and not illusive, and incomplete. For China, no less than England, belongs to our Lord’s kingdom. “China for Christ” is not a mere enthusiastic early missionary rallying cry; it is the sober, certain, eager hope and resolve of the Church, aye, and of God Almighty Himself, and we may humbly ask, Why tarry the wheels of His chariot? Or

thus, "Watchman, what of the night?" Possibly the present writer may be of some service in discussing the present situation, from the fact that he has seen China face to face enter into a storm of revolution, rebellion, and direst confusion, and emerge from it, fifty years ago and more, at the time of the not dissimilar Tai-ping Rebellion; he witnessed also, in person, the progress of reform and the assertions of China's rights up to the outbreak of the recent revolution; and such an experience ought to be of ratiocinative service in grasping the present and imminent developments.

Just now, while I am writing, news comes in alarming fits and starts: "The mysterious White Wolf is marching on Si-ngan-fu, and the Government garrison there is of doubtful loyalty, and even the troops sent to reinforce the garrison, with pay long overdue, are reported as mutinous," and later "the White Wolf" brigands have been defeated by the Government troops. Meanwhile, in Nanking, half-way down the vast 1,800 miles sweep of China, north to south, and the chief military centre in the great Yang-tse Valley, and in Peking itself, the centre of all government, a reign of terror exists, and the heads of political suspects are falling fast.

So in 1860, before this same city, Nanking, the scene afterwards of Gordon's exploits, 70,000 Imperialist soldiers, paralyzed by the dashing sortie of the beleaguered Tai-pings, laid down their arms and joined the rebel leader. It is no new symptom; and it is now, apparently, in China, a race of money—who can best bribe or buy the army's loyalty by outbidding the others. But a far worse symptom is the apparent fear that things have reached that desperate stage, where relentless cruelty, on either side, is deemed the best policy of success, a lamentable reversal of that proud boast two years ago, that the Republic was established by the most bloodless revolution ever known. The White Wolf harries the helpless and unresisting people, and not the Government army alone. The Government, if it exists still, cuts down suspects, and doubtless some innocent suspects, as fiercely as open enemies; and to strike terror is, they suppose,

the surest way to produce loyalty and patriotism. For so far as we can discern, that patriotism—the existence of which we used to doubt in China, and the uprising of which was one of the most striking phenomena three years ago—is for the present extinct or dumb in terrified retirement. The White Wolf is not, surely, a patriot, or is he, after all, carrying in his retinue refugee patriots of the rebellion? And Yuan Shih-kai may be a patriot in the highest sense, if thus alone he can save his country from anarchy. But it is not our idea or ideal of patriotism so to act. Whence has come this change?

We have not yet, however, fully described the situation in China. A message from Yuan Shih-kai to the provincial governors and officials generally, urging them as an act of true patriotism to remit to Peking the required taxes and revenue, lest China, paralyzed in her own administration and unable to keep her promises to the Western Powers and Japan, should follow the melancholy lead, with dismemberment, subjection, and alienation, of Egypt and Corea, throws perhaps a most lurid light on what China herself dreads for herself should this state of anarchy and unrest continue. It reminds the writer of another vivid parallel between China in 1914 and China in 1861. The same prospect of collapse and dismemberment, not so much a calamity, as the very possible and desirable solution of a hopeless situation, faced China and European nations then. I remember calling on board a British gunboat in the river at Ning-po, as the Tai-ping rebels were advancing on the city for their last victorious campaign, but with their power, as well as the Imperial power and dynasty, both tottering for a final fall. The officers showed me a map with the tripartite division of China provisionally traced—between Russia in the north, Great Britain in Central China, and France in the south.

In those early days America did not count, locked as she was in her internecine death-struggle; Germany's colonial and foreign far-stretched-out mailed fist was not yet in evidence; Japan was dormant as to aggression, but fiercely anti-foreign, and biding her time; and China, if she was to be broken up, was at the mercy

and disposal practically of the three then dominant nations—England, Russia, and France. Her hope now of integrity still emerging from conflict and anarchy, lies probably in this very fact, that the “powers” are so many, and will so jealously watch each other’s actions, and Japan and England are so avowedly united in this very resolve to maintain the integrity of China, that “young China’s” hysterical dream of Westernizing everything in China will not be realized by the West annexing the great land. But the very suggested fear of Yuan Shih-kai is ominous in its possibilities. It is almost inconceivable, save for those who have long known China’s incomprehensible vitality amidst apparently deadly collapse, to notice the change in the situation during so short a period as six or seven years. Reform of practical utility and of sane soundness had begun in China under the Manchu Dynasty, quickened into action by the spectacle of Japan’s astonishing victories and masterful achievements, and almost compelled into action by the gathering voice of public opinion, and the people’s demands enforced more or less articulately by their provincial and district assemblies. A change was effected where we never looked to see it—in the army. There, where ten or twenty years ago 80 per cent. of the soldiers were reported to be bad opium-smokers, the vice was checked and fast being eradicated; the officers and mandarins if they would not break off the habit resigned their commissions and seals of office. The policing of the streets and of the once robber-swept high roads through hill and plain, was effective; and the soldiers, well-clothed and well-disciplined, were becoming the pride and the confidence instead of being the curse and the dread of the country-side. This has, we fear, largely disappeared with the general anarchy. In some places the regiments are still under control, and in one city especially a strong and growing work of Divine grace is going on in the garrison, and many have become Christians. But elsewhere the soldiers, underpaid and ill-commanded, either mutiny or are disbanded; and having no means of subsistence join the bands of marauders, or White Wolf, or others; and security and

peace and hope seem banished from the land. This alarming feature in the situation, and one greatly affecting not only the safety but the very possibilities of work for our Missions, may soon pass. We noticed the same in China after the defeat of the Tai-pings at Ning-po, and after their final overthrow by Gordon and Li Hung-chang. Hundreds of foreign freebooters and the riff-raff of all nationalities who had been hired by Tai-ping or Imperial rule as mercenaries, were paid off and disbanded, and ranged the country for months, levying blackmail, presenting revolvers at the head of missionary evangelistic boats, and demanding money; and three thousand trained troops—Hunan braves—sent down from Shanghai to embark at Ning-po for Foochow, to meet the Tai-pings who were supposed to be entering that province, maintained a week of terror in Ning-po, firing shotted guns by mistake or of malice prepense, which rattled their farewell salute on the missionary's home, who had tried to get into touch with them; and, finally mutinying on board ship, had to be battered down during the whole voyage. The aftermath of China's wars and rebellions is worse than the clash and fury of actual fighting. The alarming symptom now is that it seems so widespread and getting so beyond control.

A further comparison between the two rebellions of 1850-1864 and of 1912-1913, if it does not weary our readers, may not only be interesting, but it may perhaps throw some light on the causes of the grave situation in China which we are considering. The Tai-ping struggle, which lasted thirteen years, and cost twenty million lives, and devastated thirteen out of the eighteen provinces in China, was in a sense unpremeditated, unless by the preternatural visions which in the delirium of long illness Hung Seu-tsuen avowed that he had seen. But the revolt against the Manchus sixty years ago was more justified, perhaps, because of gross misgovernment and rampant corruption than the recent outbreaks, whilst the Government, weakened by disastrous foreign wars, and by the distractions of local administration, was unable to withstand the gathering fury of the

insurrectionists. The leader, a half-Christian, had Christians of conspicuous ability round him, and though the actual fighting was not the Tai-ping's initiation, and was begun by a small body of men unjustly suspected and attacked, standing on their defence, yet it assumed the character, in the eyes of China and of Europe, of a Christian revolution and rebellion against the powers that be. It was almost hailed as such by fervid authorities in missionary debates and meetings at home, even as the present revolution has been thus heralded and acclaimed by uninstructed enthusiasts of the present day. Does the explanation of the final failure and the complete extinction of the first, and the apparent debacle and sweeping of the boards in China now—though we may be premature, I admit, in assuming such an end—does the solution of the difficulty and moral of the spectacle lie here, that the avowed Christian participation in either one was unchristian, and that Nemesis follows the attempt or assumption to introduce or establish or recommend Christianity by the sword?

Something like a wail and shudder of agony moves one's heart when we look back one short year and recall the electric flash of sympathy which sent Christendom to its knees in prayer for China, when she heard that the Chinese acting-Governor had summoned the Christians in China to fall to prayer for their country and its rulers in a crisis of extreme gravity. Was that a diplomatic or a genuine acknowledgment of the truth and power of the Christian faith; a recognition that China at length renounces all intolerance and all disabilities, and bows with her Christian sons before a God worth praying to? At any rate, the prayers of Christendom were genuine; and is this disastrous situation God's answer? Possibly yes, but only in preparation for a universal and supreme blessing after the Nemesis has done its work. Not by such means of secret plotting and sedition and conspiracy abroad and nearer home, abetted and instigated too often, it is to be feared, by foreign teachers and patrons; not by sudden and cowardly attack, and without even declaration of war, and this even when the Manchu Dynasty was yielding

point after point of necessary reform, and putting into effect scheme after scheme of drastic change, and listening, however tardily, to the people's supposed voice—not so does God's kingdom come : and the coming of that kingdom alone can bring peace on earth. I am dealing here, it will be noticed, chiefly with the idea which has possessed the minds of many true lovers of China and of God's work there, that the recent revolution was almost a Christian revolution. For it may be rejoined very plausibly that the supposed Nemesis should fall by the assumption solely on the Christian agents in the revolution ; or that Christian self-denying ordinances as to taking part in dynastic revolution and rebellion cannot control the ethics of the rest of mankind. But our contention is that the revolutionary party in China's present struggle was not guided by Christian ethics at all. They were not standing on their defence against armed attacks on their liberties and guaranteed rights. They were not as with some of the actors of another threatened tragedy, loyal and law-abiding subjects of the King and realm, thrust with violence away from that well-trying rule, and introduced to another and quite opposite control. If there had been provocation and high-handed tyranny in China's past, that had all been changed or was changing, and patriotism—unless it was the dislike of an alien rule which yet had lasted, and without grave harm to the Empire, for 300 years—true patriotism, was not much in evidence. Perhaps also a less abstruse account of the present apparent failure may be found in the policy so hastily and in so headlong a way adopted of Westernizing everything ; and this with no assured consensus of popular opinion and persuasion behind them, the only assurance being that of China's young men in their own wisdom. In some reforms—as, *e.g.*, in the great and almost supernatural opium reform, which will, we trust, survive and maintain its great and victorious strength all through China's present convulsions—nothing but the consciousness and assurance of such a consensus of the public and private conscience of China would have justified the attempt, and, through God's gracious power, have made the attempt successful. Perhaps

here will be found one great answer to the concert of prayer for China. But in other changes we hear that the people with great rejoicing went back at the permission or direction of Peking to their immemorial New Year's date and ancient observances, and the "new style" is set aside gladly for the time. There are strange symptoms observable in this perplexing land, however, which give the hope that a shock has been given to real and harmful ignorance and folly and superstition in education and in religion. The very fact that the Chinaman's natural histrionic art is seen now in reproducing to the merriment of an intelligent audience the scenery of an old-world village school (though here perhaps our young friends know too little with their Western ideas of what that old system has done for their ancestors), and a Buddhist priest at his begging and perfunctory devotions, and acting the very gods themselves, "they must needs be borne, because they cannot go," it is impossible to believe that reaction in China can ever bring back, with power or persuasion, the follies or untruths of false religion and superstition.

Yet with one more backward glance before I pass to the situation of missions in China, we cannot forget when attempting to moralize, and philosophize, and dogmatize on China's present state and prospects, that a similar awakening and passion for Western things, a similar scheme of reform, a similar and even greater overthrow of idolatry, has swept over China, and has passed by with the strange spectacle of her uprising as in a dream again, with the old methods scarce touched by the reform, and the old idolatry revarnished, however much discredited. We have heard the ridicule, yet steeped evidently in distress and regret poured upon the idols after the iconoclastic Tai-pings had swept by—"How could they save us, when they could not keep their own heads on their own shoulders?" And then they set themselves to the task, after two or three years of stolid despair, to rebuild their shattered temples and regild their decapitated idols. The idols in numbers of temples have now, by the revolution, been utterly "abolished," not from conviction

of faith in the true God so much as from room demanded for the Westernized schoolmasters in their spacious and otherwise useless buildings. Will these dethroned and outcast idols be restored again to their pedestals and worship if the old order is seriously re-established? This is possible, but hardly likely, for these successive revolutions of thought in China, though they may seem abortive and futile, yet one by one surely disintegrate more and more the foundations of superstition and ignorance in the land. I remember just twenty-one years ago listening to a speaker in Shanghai, at one of the early meetings of the Society for the diffusion of Christian and general Western literature in China, descanting on the effect of the enlightenment and principles of reform which were permeating the views of thoughtful Chinese. The process, he said, is slow, almost imperceptible at times; but thus it is that the mountains and hills of pride and prejudice must be brought low, and every valley of ignorance and degradation exalted, so will come the new era for China and the world. "*Finish the quotation!*" I inwardly exclaimed; but he stopped short, and left us wholly dissatisfied. Reform, enlightenment, instruction, education, science, art, social elevation, all will fail unless "the glory of the Lord be revealed," and unless they are all illumined and fired and inspired by the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ.

(To be concluded.)

