

## CHAPTER XIII.

1847.

### THE FIELD AND ITS PIONEERS.

“CHINA proper is a compact territory. You would only need to cut off a few projections and fill up a few indentations in order to bring it into either a circle or a square; for its length and breadth are nearly equal. It includes more than a million square miles; and lying between the twentieth and forty-second parallels of northern latitude, it enjoys on the whole an excellent climate. Two noble rivers<sup>1</sup> flow down its centre, and fertilize the most populous regions in the world. The ocean, sprinkled with islands, washes its eastern and southern coasts. The mountains of Tibet are its western barrier; and on the north it is still guarded by a wall thirteen hundred miles in length, which it cost the united labours of the nation to erect two thousand years ago. Over this wall or over these mountains, you instantly land on bleak deserts and barren wastes; and it is no wonder that in contrast with the encircling solitudes, the Chinese should have called their teeming soil, ‘The Flowery Land.’

“Wide as the surface is, the swarming inhabitants require it all. From the safest calculations, as the imperial census, the present population cannot be less than three hundred and sixty millions, or a third of the world’s inhabitants. To stow away such a multitude needs the utmost economy of room; and in its expedients for squeezing existence into the smallest possible compass, the Chinese continent resembles the cabin of a ship. Crops are grown in places where you would think none but the birds could have planted them; and in their anxiety to leave every inch available for culture, they contrive to put past themselves and their families in all inconceivable corners. They cannot double their area, but their genial sky allows them to double their harvests by sowing two crops in the year; and as land is so precious, many of this evenly-minded and compressible people are content to live on the water. Most of their rivers are strewn with these floating cottages.”<sup>2</sup>

But in truth the crowded life of the Chinese people is due not so much to the narrowness of the land, as to the variety of its surface. The sterile and inhospitable character of a large part of the empire compresses a population which on the average is not more dense than that of England into a comparatively limited space. To the west are vast mountain ranges, with

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<sup>1</sup> The Hwang-ho and Yang-tze-Keang, the “Yellow River” and the “Son of the Ocean.”

<sup>2</sup> *China and the Chinese Mission*, by the Rev. James Hamilton, pp. 1, 2.

giant peaks, frowning gorges, and forests of cedar and of pine; in the centre is a hilly region, gradually softening down into those gentle breezy slopes on which the tea plantations flourish; while to the east and seaward there stretch out wide and fertile plains, studded with towns and villages, and cultivated every inch like one vast garden. It is this last region that constitutes that teeming hive of human life with which we are familiar, and of which alone till recently we could be said to possess any authentic knowledge.

The people are quiet, industrious, orderly, mechanically civil, and artificially refined, deeply sunk indeed, like all heathen nations, in ungodliness and sin, but addicted rather to the quieter than the ruder vices. They are intensely sensual, but not fierce or cruel; though the very apathy and shallowness of their nature renders them on occasions singularly reckless of the shedding of blood. They love their children, and have more than any other heathen people of the sentiment of home and family life; and yet the inconvenience of an overcrowded country induces them to expose by myriads their female offspring.

Their religion is a strange medley of diverse creeds, dwelling together in peace, and blending more or less together in the ideas and life of the people. "The first of these was founded by Confucius in the sixth century. It is the religion of the literati, and of the present emperor; but there is no reason why it should be called a religion, except that its votaries believe in nothing besides. It consists of a few moral and practical maxims, and evades the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. The Confucians are the atheists and the philosophic utilitarians of China. Next comes the Taou sect, whose founder, Laou-tsze, lived in the days of Confucius. Unlike the Confucians, who believe in nothing supernatural, the followers of Laou-tsze have peopled earth and air with all sorts of spirits and demons. They deal in magic, and are constantly consulting maniacs and others whom they deem possessed; and it used to be their great problem to discover the elixir of immortality. They are the fanatics of China. And then we have a sect not of Chinese but Indian origin, and far more popular than the other two, the Buddhists. The object of their ambition is to lose all personal identity, and be absorbed into Buddha. Contemplation and abstraction of mind are their highest enjoyments, and to lose all contact with earthly things—to live 'without looking, speaking, hearing, or smelling,' is the nearest approach to perfection. They are the mystics and ascetics of China."<sup>3</sup> Such as it is, the religion of this strange and singular people obtrudes itself everywhere. The land teems with images. "Their temples, houses, streets, roads, hills, rivers,

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<sup>3</sup> *China and the Chinese*, pp. 9, 10.

carriages, and ships, are full of idols; every room, niche, corner, door, and window, is plastered with charms, amulets, and emblems of idolatry.”<sup>4</sup>

Add to these particulars one or two characteristic features more,—their singular reverence for the tombs and for the memories of their ancestors,—their ancestral tablets and ancestral religious rites; their one written, and their many spoken, languages; their universal system of education and of literary examination and degrees, upon which, by a remarkable anticipation of our recent civil service reforms, the appointment to all public offices of trust and profit depends; their strange and whimsical, but often rich and showy costume—the tails and silk robes of the men, and the cramped feet of the women; their eager curiosity, especially in the inland districts, about the persons and the movements of strangers, making the hapless traveller often ten minutes after his arrival the centre of an excited crowd, which fills doors and windows, and almost stops the traffic of the streets; their fortune-tellers, their story-tellers, their jugglers, and their rude but vastly popular stage-plays, held in the open air, at the expense usually of some rich citizen, and open to all comers; their pleasant life in canals and rivers, in boats which serve often for weeks together both for locomotion and lodging, and which, moored close to the gate of some populous town or city, make the stranger at once at home in the place of his sojourning; their multitudinous and meaningless religious ceremonies, in which there is scarcely anything of religion or religious belief; and in fine, their measurement of time not by weeks but by the periodical recurrence of market-days, evermore painfully reminding the missionary that he dwells in a Sabbathless land;—and we shall be able to form a tolerably distinct idea of the circumstances and scenes in the midst of which we have now to place ourselves, and with which, in the course of our narrative, we shall become more and more familiar.

Towards this vast and interesting field the missionary spirit of the Christian Church was at a very early period directed. The charm of mystery and distance exercised a certain fascination over imaginative minds, in behalf of a people whose peaceful industry and prosaic artificial civilization lent to them little of the interest of romance. Ardent spirits longed to pierce the barriers of that great unknown land, and to claim the first kingdom of the far east for Christ. As early, probably, as the seventh century, certainly as early as the eighth, Christian missionaries from the Nestorian Churches in Persia found their way to China, and sowed the seeds of a Christian belief and profession, the traces of which survived, though with little power or purity, for several centuries.<sup>5</sup> During the twelfth century the western world was filled with rumours and tales, probably not altogether without a basis of

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<sup>4</sup> Medhurst's *China*, p. 219.

<sup>5</sup> See Neander's *Church History*, v. 115.

truth, of a Christian king ruling over a Christian people in the country immediately to the north of China; who under the name of Prester John exercised the functions at once of priest and king, and handed down both name and office to his successors for several generations.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries we trace the footsteps of pioneers of nobler mould and of more pure and enlightened Christian views, conspicuous amongst whom was the Franciscan John de Monte Corvino; a man, says Neander, "in whom we recognize the pattern of a true missionary." After labouring for a season in Persia and India, he found his way at length to Pekin,<sup>6</sup> obtained influence and favour at the imperial court, translated the New Testament and the Book of Psalms into the vernacular tongue, laboured for the education of the young and the rearing up of native missionaries, baptized six thousand converts and founded two churches, one of which was so near the royal palace, that the emperor could hear in his chamber the voices of the children singing the praises of God. While yet only fifty-eight years in age he had already grown grey in the midst of labours and hardships whose record is on high, and the results of which the day shall declare.<sup>7</sup> He was no unworthy precursor to another, bearing a still more illustrious name, who appeared on the scene two centuries and a half later.

In the year 1553 the ardent and holy Francis Xavier arrived at the island of Sancian, on his way to the neighbouring coast of China, on the evangelization of which he had set his heart. After all his labours in India and Japan, he deemed that he had accomplished nothing unless he had unfurled the standard of the cross in the great eastern empire, and claimed possession of its vast domains for Christ. After manifold obstacles and difficulties he seemed at last on the eve of the accomplishment of his cherished purpose. From the little islet on the shore he could look across to the rocky coast of the land which he so ardently longed to enter, and was in daily expectation of a native merchant junk to convey him there. His purpose was to land furtively under cloud of night; he was almost sure to be seized and imprisoned ere yet he had almost begun his work; but he would at least, he thought, have Chinese fellow-prisoners, and in their hearts he might sow the seeds of a harvest that should spring up after he was dead. But the great Master who so often accepts the purpose for the deed, and in whose vast field of labour "one soweth and another reapeth," had ordained it otherwise. While still waiting for the expected vessel, he was seized with a virulent fever, under which he sunk. "Stretched on the naked beach, with the cold blasts of a Chinese winter aggravating his pains," he wrestled alone with the last enemy, yet his countenance was lit up with heavenly

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<sup>6</sup> Anciently, Cambalu.

<sup>7</sup> Neander, vii. 76-77.

brightness, and tears of holy joy streamed from his eyes, as he exclaimed with his last breath, "O Lord, in thee have I trusted! I shall never be confounded."<sup>8</sup>

The fallen standard was soon taken up by other and not unworthy hands. The Italian Jesuit, Valignano, halting at Macao on his way to Japan, cast his eyes wistfully towards the neighbouring shores of China, still sternly closed against the gospel, and exclaimed, "O Rock, Rock, when wilt thou open!" Not satisfied with mere aspirations, he deputed two of the ablest and most devoted of his companions to attempt an entrance into the forbidden territory. The enterprise was successful. With that remarkable combination of zeal and subtlety which is characteristic of their order, they contrived to establish themselves on Chinese soil, first under the disguise of Buddhist priests, and then under the garb of Chinese literati; and a few years afterwards we find one of their number, Matthew Ricci, filling an important literary office at the capital, and high in the favour of the emperor, while labouring with devoted zeal for the propagation of the faith which he had come to preach. He died in 1610, amid the tears of his brethren and the reverential mourning of the entire community, having spent twenty-seven years of incessant labour in China, and leaving behind him more than three hundred churches in a land in which he had been in modern times the first Christian missionary.

After him followed in succession Adam Schaal (ob. 1666) and Ferdinand Verbiest (ob. 1688), men in every way worthy to tread in his footsteps, and to carry forward the work which he had so auspiciously begun. Like him they were men of science as well as men of faith; and as in his case, a position of influence and honour was speedily opened to them as savans, which would have been denied to them as missionaries. But though they were patronized and protected not for the sake of their message, but for their skill in arranging the calendar, casting cannon, and negotiating treaties, they seem never to have lost sight of the great purpose of their mission, for which alone they sought to live and were ready any moment to die. While themselves pleading the cause of Christ at the court and in the capital, they were enabled at the same time to stretch their protecting shield over their humbler brethren in the provinces, and to further the admission of fresh labourers within the jealously guarded bounds of the empire. Of the extent of their success we may form some estimate from the fact that in the single year 1671, in which, after a season of persecution, their churches were again opened, but all attempts at conversion were prohibited, we find mention of no fewer than 20,000 baptisms; of its quality, however, in a scriptural and evangelical point of view, it is more difficult to judge. It is impossible

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<sup>8</sup> In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in æternum.

wholly to separate the character of the men from the deadly poison of the system in which they had been born and bred, and which must have shed its pernicious influence more or less into all their teaching. Yet we are permitted to believe that the one foundation at least of saving doctrine really *was* laid. “Their earlier tracts,” says Dr. James Hamilton, “are very different from the legendary stuff circulated in Popish lands. A missionary well acquainted with them says, ‘On the Trinity and incarnation they are clear; while the perfections of the Deity, the corruption of human nature, and redemption by Christ are fully stated; and though some unscriptural notions are now and then introduced, yet all things considered, it is quite possible for humble and patient learners to discover by such teaching their sinful condition, and trace out the way of salvation through a Redeemer.’ And as some of their first missionaries were earnest men, and evinced their zeal in cheerful martyrdom, some of their converts appear to have been exemplary Christians.”

It is impossible, for instance, to read without deep interest of the learned Mandarin Paul, so called because on his conversion he desired to be the apostle of his countrymen, and who henceforth lived only to advance amongst high and low the cause he loved: or of his widowed daughter Candida, who, after providing for those of her own house, consecrated the whole remainder of her fortune to the service of Christ—founding churches, printing Christian books, building hospitals for outcast children, teaching the blind story-tellers in the streets to tell, in place of their fabulous tales, the story of the Cross,—who gained even from the emperor the title of “the virtuous woman,” and “was bewailed when she died by the poor as their mother, by the converts as their pattern, and by the missionaries as their best friend.”<sup>9</sup> So we may fondly trust that the unwearied faith and patience of so many devoted labourers, albeit with defective or erroneous views of the truth they loved, were not unowned by the Master, and that amid much earthly dross there may have been many grains of precious gold, which shall be found “unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

From the days of Verbiest until now, the Romish church has never been without its representatives in China. Of these the French missionaries De Fontaney, Gerbillon, Bovet, and Le Comte, with their successors during the 18th and 19th centuries, were especially distinguished for zeal, ability, and success. Hindered and interrupted often by imperial interdicts or open persecution, they still held their ground and laboured unceasingly, sometimes openly, sometimes secretly, for the propagation of the faith. At the time at which our narrative begins they numbered 170 missionaries and

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<sup>9</sup> Medhurst’s *China*, 228.

upwards of 200,000 converts. Meantly as we may estimate the character of their work or the quality of its results, to them belongs the undisputed honour of having been first in the field, and of having held forth a bright example of faith and zeal, which the Reformed Churches were but too slow to follow.

In the year 1806 Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, was set apart to the work, in Swallow Street Scotch Church, London, under the auspices of the London Missionary Society, and arrived at Macao on September 4th, 1807. "There, in a warehouse which he rented, he plodded on in his secret labours at the language, hardly venturing out among the suspicious inhabitants, and hiding the lamp by which he studied behind a volume of *Henry's Commentary*. After ten years of toil he completed a herculean task, and printed in six quartos a *Dictionary of Chinese*; and after being joined by a like-minded labourer, Dr. Milne, had the happiness to translate into Chinese the entire Word, which, by the amazing ingenuity and industry of a brother missionary, was printed in a new and beautiful style." He was a man indeed singularly fitted by the gifts alike of nature and of grace for the work which he had undertaken, and specially at the particular stage which that work had then reached, with "talents rather of the solid than of the showy kind; fitted more for continued labour than for sudden bursts of genius," and with a shrewd caution which was of great price in "a station where one false step at the beginning might have delayed the work for years." For eighteen long years he laboured on unobtrusively and unweariedly, himself but little seen, but his eye ever fixed on the Master and the Master's business. He died in 1834, having been preceded twelve years by his beloved brother and true yoke-fellow Dr. Milne. Though the time of fruit was not yet, they were honoured to gather some precious firstfruits of China unto Christ, conspicuous amongst whom were Leang Afah and Keuh Agang, who long survived them as consistent disciples and zealous and successful preachers of the gospel. But their work was that of pioneers rather than of cultivators of the land; gathering little fruit themselves, but preparing the seed for many harvests yet to come. Their true monument is the Chinese Bible and the Chinese College,<sup>10</sup> and the enduring memory of that "work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope" in the midst of all discouragements and difficulties, by which, though dead, they yet speak to all that follow after them, and which shall be remembered to their honour in that day "when they that sowed and they that reaped shall rejoice

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<sup>10</sup> The Anglo-Chinese College founded at Malacca, in 1818, for the cultivation of English and Chinese literature, and thereby promoting the propagation of Christianity in the far East. Dr. Morrison himself made the munificent offering of £1500 towards the carrying out of this object, in which we must recognize the true precursor of the educational missionary institutes originated by Dr. Duff in Hindustan twenty years later.

together.” They will be ever recognized and honoured as the true fathers of the Chinese Protestant Missions and of the Chinese Protestant Church.

With the opening of the five ports to foreign residents and foreign traffic in 1842,<sup>11</sup> just eight years after Morrison had closed his work on earth, a great impulse was naturally given to the cause of Chinese missions, and representatives of all the great societies in Britain and in America speedily hastened to the field. Within four years there were already in China, or on the way to it, fifty Protestant missionaries. The field so long jealously guarded and hedged around was suddenly thrown open and lay white unto the harvest, and eager reapers were hastening from every side to cut it down.

Such were the main incidents in the past history of the work on which the subject of this memoir now entered, with the ardent zeal of a Xavier, with the patient constancy of a Morrison, and with a consecration of heart and an abnegation of self equal to any of those who had ever trod that distant shore.

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<sup>11</sup> By the treaty of Nanking, 1842, the ports of Canton, Amoy, Foo-Chow, Ning-po, and Shanghai were opened, and Hong-Kong was ceded to Britain. By the treaty of Tien-sin, 1858, the ports of Neu-Chwang, Teng-Chow, Tai-wan, Swatow, and Kien-Chow, and the river Yang-tse-kiang up to Hankow were opened to commerce. By convention of Peking, 1860, Tien-sin was opened to trade, and Cowloon ceded to Britain.