

CHINA AND CHRISTIANITY

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China and Christianity by Alexander Michie

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ALEXANDER MICHIE

AUTHOR OF "MISSIONARIES IN CHINA"

BOSTON

KNIGHT AND MILLET

1900

Introduction.



A FEW words of introduction to this volume may not be out of place, as the author and his writings are little known to American readers. Mr. Alexander Michie has been for nearly twenty years the correspondent of the London Times, resident in Peking. During that period he has enjoyed such advantages as come to the representative of so influential a journal. He has been brought into contact with not only the highest of Chinese officialdom, but with the representatives of foreign powers, many of whom have been prominent figures in the game of Diplomacy so actively played in the far East.

A careful observer, and a close student of all questions bearing upon the Chinese problem,

he knows whereof he writes, and in this volume has discussed with rare calmness and sobriety the many perplexing questions which have culminated in the present deplorable outbreak in China.

This volume was published a few years since in Tien Tsin, reaching only a small circle of readers among the English speaking people of the East. Its merits entitle it to a wider reading, and there can be no more opportune occasion than the present to offer it to American readers, as a helpful aid to the formation of an enlightened public opinion on one of the burning questions of the hour.

THE PUBLISHERS.

P R E F A C E.



A PUBLICATION which meets but qualified approval from esteemed friends may be thought to stand in need of an Apology.

There seems to be some fear that the tendency of the following essay is to widen rather than to heal the breach by fostering Chinese prejudice against Christianity on the one hand and displeasing an influential section of the foreign public on the other. Beneath this apprehension may possibly be a latent feeling that as regards the institutions of Christendom in the East, the rule for speakers and writers should be *nil nisi bonum*. But such implied immunity, if ever claimed in words, would not be conceded by one section of the Christian Church to another.

Fully recognizing that there is a time as well as a place to speak and to be silent, the writer

considers that the present is no time for reticence respecting matters which keep the relations between Chinese and foreigners in a state of dangerous tension, but that on the contrary it is just the time for plain speaking on these burning questions. We Western nations stand in a position of peculiar moral responsibility towards China. She has not sought us, but we her. She does not press her religion or her polity on us, but we press ours on her. In such a relationship the onus of justification necessarily rests on the stronger who imposes his will on the weaker; and where, as in the present case, no competent neutral arbiter exists it becomes the duty of the aggressor himself, if he desires to be just, to assume, as far as may be, the functions of such ideal referee, and to give a patient consideration to all the pleas, substantial or flimsy, advanced by, or on behalf of, the weaker side.

This obligation, which has been understood and loyally discharged in regard to such tangible matters as trade, carries tenfold weight where moral relations are concerned; and those who resolve to support religion, among an alien

people, by force, owe it to themselves to consider well both what they do, and how they do it. Errors in common affairs seldom sink so deep or spread so wide as to be irremediable, but mistakes in propagating and establishing religion may quickly pass beyond remedy, and bear consequences beyond calculation. For its transcendency involves misconception and misdirection; its purity gives the measure of its susceptibility to contamination; while its hold of the inner feelings of humanity diffuses and renders indelible whatever taint it may contract from its surroundings. Hence the tenacity of opinions and observances, even of a trivial character, which have once become incorporated with any religious cult. Hence also the difficulty of religious reform as compared with other kinds.

Obviously then an essence of such subtlety demands the finest tact on the part of those who have the handling of it, in whatever capacity. And though it is not possible, for want of a competent and acknowledged authority, to protect the Christianity as we guard the purity of the vaccine lymph which is imported into

the country, it ought not to be too much to expect that the grosser elements of untruth, injustice and vulgar strife should be, as far as possible, eliminated alike from friendly and unfriendly association with the introduction into China of what is justly claimed to be the crown and consummation of the world's religions.

To those, if there be any such, who think the cause of religion may be served by hiding any part of the record it would be difficult to give an answer which is not already patent in the exceeding frankness of both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. The fear of telling the Chinese too much would be in any case an idle fear, seeing the books of history and of observation lie wide open. Who, for example, shall prevent them from discussing the episode of Uganda? The recent dictum of an African missionary that "influence which is gained at the price of keeping unpleasant truths in the background is not worth having" has a wide application. No lasting understanding is likely to be attained between China and the Western world without unreserved communications touching matters of fact, and the dropping of