

DOMINICAN GLORIES IN CHINA

During the last few years the Chinese Missions have aroused an enthusiastic interest not only in Europe but also in America. It seems as though a new world, peopled by hundred of thousands of intelligent men, had been thrown open, offering a glorious sphere of missionary activity. Under the republican regime, the gates of China, shut for thousands of years, have been flung open, mighty and well-equipped armies of missionaries and educators, especially Protestant, have been pouring into those new fields.

They are fields, however, that have long been cultivated by Catholic missionaries, among whom were the children of St. Dominic, who for nearly three centuries have labored in that vineyard of the Lord. The first apostle of the old empire in modern times was Father Gasper da Cruz, a Portugese Dominican, who in 1556 entered China and blazed the way for the preachers of the Gospel who were to follow him. But we wish to lay especial stress on another fact, not less glorious, but less well known. This fact is that the first and oldest institution, actually existing, devoted to the conversion of China is the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary, nursing-mother of glorious martyrs and missionaries, which was founded in 1587.

Father Aduarte, the earliest historiographer of the Holy Rosary Province, who lived with the first Fathers and took an active part in many a glorious enterprise, states that the purpose of the founders of this Province was to preach the Gospel to the Chinese. "Although the zeal for the salvation of souls," says he, "that animated the first religious who came to these regions embraced all these peoples, yet the desire of the conversion of China was the greatest and the main motive of their coming here. So, on reaching Manila they earnestly endeavored to learn the difficult Chinese language."¹

The Master General, Father Paul Constabilis, in letters of approbation to Fr. John Chrysostom and to the founders of the Province, dated July 14, 1582, grants them permission "to gather thirty Fathers from the Provinces of Spain for the Philippine Islands and for the vast kingdom of China." Pope Gregory XIII

¹"Historia de la Provincia del Smo. Rosario de Filipinas, China y Japon," chap. XXVII.

confirmed this permission and instituted Fr. J. Chrysostom Vicar General "in the Philippines and in the Kingdom of China."²

To accomplish this end of the new missionary Province, its founders, while still in Mexico on their way to the Philippines, sent three Fathers to Macao, in the south of China, to prepare for the entrance of other future preachers. But all their efforts to enter the strictly closed empire failed, to the great sorrow of the Province. Meanwhile, its founders had established their headquarters in Manila as the nearest and surest point from which they might step, at the first opportunity, into those long-desired missions. Fr. Benavides was especially absorbed by this idea. He earnestly studied their language to convert the Chinese traders who came to Manila by thousands. He established a hospital where he assisted them and converted a good number of them. Finally, with Fr. J. Castro, the first Provincial, he succeeded in reaching the shores of China; but after having been in prison and ill-treated, they were cast out of the Empire.

In 1595, 1604, 1612 and 1618 the Philippine Province renewed its attempts; but all in vain. The eyes of the Fathers were constantly fixed on that great harvest of souls that nobody could gather up for the celestial graneries. All their projects were frustrated, for the hour had not yet come. This hour finally struck when Fr. A. Cochi and Fr. Thomas Sierra sailed from Formosa in a small boat manned by Chinese who, rising in arms against them, killed Fr. Sierra. Fr. Cochi escaped by miracle from their hands and set foot in China on Jan. 1, 1631. From that day the Dominicans in China have suffered no interruption in their work in the mission-field entrusted to their care. Two years later Fr. J. B. Morales, the great travelling missionary and the champion of the controversy of the Chinese rites, arrived in Fokien. In 1648 the first Christian blood was shed in the Empire, and the glorious Francis de Capillas became the promartyr of China. Other Dominicans followed the same bloody path, among them, Blessed Sanz, Serrano, Alcober, Royo and Diaz, who won the martyr's aureola in Foochow in 1747 and 1748. These missions have also the glory of having given to the ecclesiastical hierarchy Fr. Gregory Lo or Lopez, O. P., the only native bishop of China.

² Ibid., chap. I, "Exponi Nobis," Oct. 20, 1582.

Another Dominican glory in the great Empire which is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented is the famous question of the Chinese rites. When the Dominican pioneers commenced their work in Fokien, they found in use among the Christians some practices—for example ancestor-worship—that they deemed superstitious and not tolerable. Fr. Ricci, S. J., and his fellow-workers allowed them, regarding them as mere civil ceremonies; hence, a controversy arose about their toleration or prohibition. After long debates that lasted for a century, the Holy See decided in favor of the Dominicans.

In commencing and prosecuting this long and heated controversy our missionaries were not actuated by rashness, excess of zeal or by ignorance of Chinese customs, as some writers maintained,³ but solely by zeal for the purity of Catholic doctrine which, according to their judgment, was tainted by those practices with superstition to such a degree that Christian morals were likely to be seriously affected. Their keen theological minds immediately perceived that those ceremonies were illicit and intolerable; and their fearless hearts were courageous enough to protest energetically against them and to suffer persecution and exile for their sake. That their position was the right one was proclaimed by Innocent X, and XII, and especially by the great Benedict XIV, who finally terminated the controversy by commanding all the missionaries in China to take an oath of rejecting the Chinese rites as they had been condemned by the Dominicans.

The history of these missions from their inception till recent years is one of uninterrupted persecution, exile and martyrdom. For nearly three centuries their hard-working missionaries had no rest nor interval of peace. The early Church of Christ in the Catacombs for three hundred years, furiously persecuted by all the powers of the earth; but from thence she arose with overwhelming strength, overcoming her persecutors and tormentors. The Church in China, likewise, has for three centuries struggled for existence, buried like the grain of wheat in the earth, and stormed by unceasing blasts of persecution. But today those Missions, surviving the days of trial, are able to display wider

³ Cf. "The Catholic Encyclopedia," articles on Chinese Rites and on Fr. M. Ricci, where the writer, trying to justify the proceedings and intentions of Fr. Ricci and of his brethren, charges the Dominican and Franciscan missionaries with the aforesaid imputations.

activity and to meet the demands of the awakening Chinese people. There is among the new generation in China an insatiable craving for knowledge. They eagerly seek to acquire that enlightened civilization that has brought prosperity to other nations. For this reason the Holy Rosary Province has erected a college in Foochow for the education of pagan children and for the formation of future catechists and schoolteachers. St. Dominic's College, although the youngest in the city, has already won the leading place over the fourteen colleges conducted by the Government and by Protestants. This palm of leadership was ascribed to it by the governor of the city and by the people in various public celebrations.

The actual mission-field cultivated by the Dominicans embraces the whole Province of Fokien, a territory of 46,332 square miles with 24,000,000 population (Louisiana has 48,506 square miles and only 1,656,000 inhabitants). The Catholics of Fokien, including those of the Island of Formosa, number about 60,000 and the catechumens 20,000. The Dominican missionaries are seventy in number; thirty Sisters of the same Order are in charge of the Holy Childhood Orphanages, wherein some 6,000 girl babies are received every year.

The field is large and the harvest is ripe, but the workers are few. The missionaries are longing for the day when other laborers and brethren will come to help them in gathering in a rich harvest of souls. May the Lord hasten the day when the Province of Saint Joseph will join with that of Holy Rosary to add new splendor to the Dominican glories in China!

—Bro. John Labrador, O. P.

MEERESTILLE

(After the German)

Deep calm rules on the ocean,
Smooth is the surface around;
Still lies the sea without motion,
Hushed in a silence profound.

Swept by no breeze is the ocean,
Death-like the stillness falls;
Fraught is the sea by no motion,
Nature the quiet enthalls!

—Bro. John Chrysostom Kearns, O. P.