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THE AMERICAN DOMINICANS' TERRITORY IN CHINA

It is a matter of conjecture today as to the time when the name of Christ was first heard in China. We know that when the Apostles went forth to preach St. Thomas chose the Far East as the field of his labors. It is thought that he entered the Celestial Empire; but of this there is no absolute certainty. Some evidence exists indicating the presence of missionaries in the country during the early Christian ages, but they are meagre and unsatisfactory. Many missionaries may have preached and died among these people, but intent as they were upon the salvation of souls they left but few records, if any—or else none preserved them for posterity.

There is little direct evidence to show that the Dominicans of the thirteenth century did missionary work in this vast country, though it is very probable, since they had established missions in the near vicinity. The Dominicans labored in Tartary, to the north of China, and in Syria, not far distant from its borders. So it is quite probable that efforts were made from time to time to enter the country to evangelize it. But if such efforts were actually made they were necessarily sporadic and not enduring in results.

The first permanent organized effort of our Order to evangelize this nation was made in 1582, when the Province of the Most Holy Rosary was founded for that purpose by the Spanish Fathers. These Friars at once established a station on the island of Formosa, off the eastern coast of China, and near the province of Fukien. It was their intention to sail on from this point to the Chinese coast and penetrate the interior. Repeated efforts were made, they suffered persecution and banishment many times, and finally after years of untold hardships and countless disappointments they succeeded in obtaining a permanent foothold in the province of Fukien where for over three hundred years they have carried on their work successfully, interrupted only when an unfriendly government or internal dis-

orders in the country compelled them to forsake their active missionary efforts for a time.

It was during one of these many persecutions in Fukien that the first blood was shed for Christ in China. To Blessed Francis Capillas, O. P., belongs this great distinction. Worn out by sickness and his arduous missionary labors he bore up with marked constancy under the false accusations and calumnies of Christianity and when he was finally condemned to be beheaded he received his sentence with manifestations of great peace, rejoicing that he was accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. The execution took place in 1642. On the occasion of his solemn beatification Pope Pius X said of him: "The venerable servant of God, Francis de Capillas, missionary priest of the Order of Preachers . . . can be rightly and meritoriously called the Protomartyr of China."

The Spanish Friars of the Most Holy Rosary Province during these many centuries of labor among the Chinese people in Fukien have won many souls to the Catholic faith. But recently owing to conditions brought about by the war, the growing number of Christians and the increased demands upon their service they have found that they could no longer adequately administer such a large territory without aid, so they called upon the Dominican Province of St. Joseph in the United States for assistance. This call to foreign mission fields is a familiar one to Dominicans and was joyfully received and accepted by the American Dominicans, and the advance guard—the first American Dominican missionaries to China—are now on their way to our new vineyard. Naturally, interest in this project has been intense and many are anxious to learn something of the country and present conditions which will confront our first missionaries upon their arrival.

The territory which has been assigned to the St. Joseph Province—a part of the original Spanish territory—embraces five large cities and about two hundred villages with a total population of about one million. The principal city is Kienning-fu which nestles among the hills bordering either side of a branch of the Ming-Kiang river. The climate is sub-tropical, resembling that of California. Kienning-fu is in the same latitude as Tampa, Florida. The soil is fertile and well adapted to the rais-

ing of all the common American vegetables as well as those native to the country.

From the natural advantages of the location and from the mere mention of the magic name of California one is apt to imagine that surely this must be a pleasant place for a missionary. But we must not forget that it is China with its age-old customs, its deep-rooted paganism and its abject poverty. Nature has indeed been bountiful but the Chinese have not utilized her gifts as would have the more ingenious Americans. The contrast between the living conditions and the conveniences of the two countries is difficult of realization to one who has not experienced actual contact with both of them. The missionary who reaches Kienning-fu does not arrive at a modern railroad station, alight from a Pullman car, signal a taxi, or board a trolley car. Neither does he register at a comfortable hotel, for Kienning-fu has none of these modern conveniences. The principal city of our mission territory is reached, if one has good luck, after an arduous trip of eight days from Foochow, a distance of 136 miles. The trip is made up the Ming-Kiang river on a small "house boat" drawn by "man power," much the same as our slow moving canal boats travel under the motive power of mules or horses.

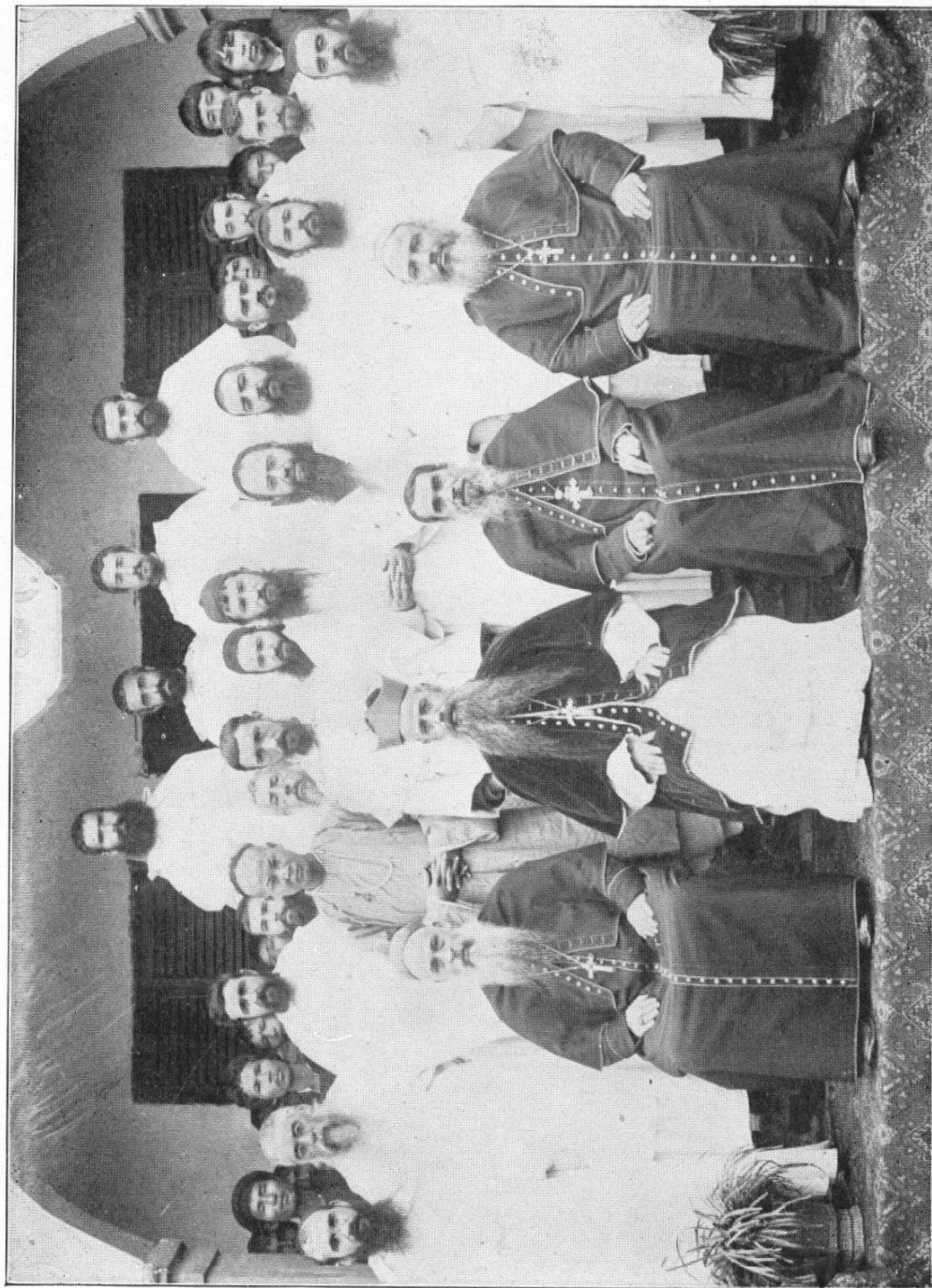
In the whole district assigned to the American Dominicans there are no railroads, street cars, or automobiles. Worse than this, there are no roads or streets. The nearest approach to streets are the winding crooked alleys that separate some of the buildings in the larger cities. The river and foot travel furnish the only means of transportation, except the sedan chairs. These are narrow chairs with poles supporting them by means of which the traveler is borne on the shoulders of two or three stalwart "coolies," as the Chinese laborers are called. If our territory were prosperous enough to boast of streets another means of travel would be available, the small two-wheeled carriage, the "jin rick sha," or the "man-power-carriage," since it is drawn by one man.

One accustomed to our modern conveniences to which we hardly give a thought has a difficult time picturing the Dominican missionary in Kienning-fu. Here we snap a switch and flood our room with light; turn a valve and the radiator sends forth its heat; light a match and the gas stove glows; turn a faucet and water flows; lift a receiver and talk to distant friends;

"tune-in" and hear the evening concert; pick up the last edition and learn the news and happenings of our day—these and a thousand other conveniences which are so much a part of our daily life are not to be found in Kienning-fu. No city light plant, waterworks, sewerage system, telephone exchange or modern department store administers to the needs of the American missionary. No grocery wagon stops in front of the mission house, and no ice man makes his daily round. All provisions must come up the river from Foochow, in the same boat the missionary used. Other necessities have a longer trip, from Hong Kong or Shanghai—or even from America. Such welcome messengers as letters from those "back home" or month-old newspapers reach the missionaries in safety only because he has hired agents at the main ports of Shanghai and Hong Kong. These agents collect the mail from incoming liners and hold it until they are sending supplies or provisions up the river to the mission headquarters. Just when the trip is made and the missionary receives his two or three months' accumulation of mail depends upon the contingency of the agent securing a trustworthy boat and a reliable crew.

When the missionary leaves Kienning-fu for one of the towns or villages where no mission house is as yet established, he must seek lodging with some Chinese family. Unless he is hardened to sleeping on the soft side of a board or on the ground he must furnish his own bedding, for the Chinese family will have no "spare room." He will probably select the ground and that outdoors, for the Chinese are not especially noted for ventilation. Indeed, the only opening in the typical Chinese house of this district is the door. Windows are a luxury that has not as yet been introduced. If he breakfasts with his host it will consist of one or two vegetables and tea. No coffee or breakfast food graces the table of the Chinese. Both are almost unknown and the table certainly is. Our manner of dining, with our snow white linen and silverware, is a custom that our missionary will almost forget before he uses it again. Eating off the floor with chop sticks for forks is a far cry from our American standards.

Difficult as are the many disadvantages of the missionary's life, such as have been outlined, they are not the hardest part of his exile. Living among the heathens, conforming to their customs, learning their difficult language—all this is a part of the



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The Principal City, the Seat of the Present Mission House, is Indicated by the Arrow

day's work. The big trial and the most difficult one is the isolation. The missionary is a man apart for no other white man resides within miles of him; consequently no companionship is offered him. Even the periodic trip to the neighboring missionary for confession may take days. Only the apostolic zeal and the desire to win souls to Christ support these heroic missionaries in their lonely exile—this and the knowledge that back home prayers are daily ascending heavenward for the success of their efforts.

The natives of the district in which our missionaries are destined to labor are, on the whole, humble, docile and neighborly. They are also very poor and their living conditions are deplorable and exceedingly congested. In the province of Fukien, an area about the size of Alabama, in which the district of Kienning-fu is situated, more than 36,000,000 people live. A little patch of ground and a single rice field support an incredible number of these natives. A surprisingly large portion of the inhabitants of the Dominican territory live on the rivers and obtain an easy, although a scanty living, by fishing and ferrying an occasional passenger across the stream. In many instances whole families are born, live and die on board a very small boat. This river life might at first glance appeal to many a young American with his desire to be "near the water," but his enthusiasm will surely be dampened when he learns that the Chinese mother, in order to guard against unexpected plunges into the river, tethers her children to the deck by the simple means of a rope and collar. As she goes about her boat duties if she hears a splash and a gurgle and turning sees the rope taut, it is not a cause for frantic excitement. It is merely the signal to retrieve one of the venturesome children. The rope is hauled in, the child sprawls on the deck to dry and the mother, unruffled, proceeds with her duties.

The Chinese people are, as a rule, kind, generous and well disposed towards religion. The whole nation should not be judged nor its character summed up in the words of Bret Harte, whose knowledge of them was gained entirely on our own Pacific Coast:

"For ways that are dark
And tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinese is peculiar."

The Chinese are instinctively a religious people. However, it is not easy to make them see that Christianity suffices for all the

needs of humanity here on earth, for they are inclined to believe that the true God may be worshipped together with Buddha, Confucius and the shades of the long departed ancestors. Ancestor worship is deeply imbedded in the Chinese nature. In every house there is a tablet engraved with the names of the departed forefathers. These tablets might be compared to the "Lares and Penates" of Roman mythology—the spirits of dead ancestors, for the Chinese actually worship these tablets. Like the household gods of ancient Rome the Chinese will cling to them when all else is lost. If the Chinaman is wealthy enough he will set aside a separate room or even an entire building, much like a shrine, for his tablets.

To this ancestor worship can be attributed many of the ills under which China labors today. It is directly responsible, for instance, for the barbarous and typically pagan custom of infanticide, whereby female children are exposed and left to die by the thousands. Girl babies are considered worthless, for it is the male descendants who perform the family rites, perpetuate the ancestral cult and continue the name of the father. Consequently those women who have been spared are held in almost universal contempt and even in our churches, owing to this deep rooted feeling, they must be separated from the men. Coming to and returning from church the mother and daughters must walk behind father and sons. It will be a matter of many years before this custom is finally eradicated and woman elevated to the honored place she holds in Christian countries.

It may be surprising to many to learn that each year more than 500,000 newly baptized infants die in the foundling asylums already provided throughout China by the Catholic missions. Without this Christian aid these children would be left to perish miserably by the wayside. It is these foundling asylums and the Catholic schools which are the greatest hope for pagan China. An encouraging sign is that the Chinese have not been slow to note the advantages of modern education, and even pagan parents are anxious to place their children in the atmosphere of the Sisters' schools. These pagan children, observing the beneficial effects of Christian training upon their baptized school-companions, catch the spirit which animates the school and learn the true concept of God. While the older people are so steeped in their ancient ancestor worship and pagan traditions as to render

their conversion almost a human impossibility, the younger generation, growing up under the Christian influence will be far better disposed for the reception of the seed of the true faith. This is the bright prospect of the future, but the progress must necessarily be slow, due to the sheer physical and financial impossibility of sending a sufficient number of priests and sisters to China to cover the immense territory.

Such in briefest outline, are the country and conditions that will confront our American Dominican missionaries upon their arrival in Kienning-fu. It is essentially the work of the apostolic Order of Preachers to labor among these people sunken in superstition and unbelief. Since its foundation, more than seven hundred years ago, the Dominican Order has ever been foremost among those laboring for the conversion of those farthest removed from the influence of the true religion. The present instance is to prove no exception. The American Dominicans are taking their place with the other organizations engaged upon this Christian work. Much is expected of us and with God's help we shall not fail. The heroic missionaries are giving their all to the cause, but the task is a divided one. Unless the material assistance is given to them by the American Catholics the results of the missionaries' labors will indeed be meagre. Prayer and financial assistance are as essential a part of the whole plan to bring Christ to China as the missionaries' actual presence in the pagan country. The poverty stricken people of China cannot build and support a sufficient number of schools, hospitals, asylums and churches regardless of how great a desire they may have to do so. And without these the conversion of China is a futile dream.

—Bro. Alfred Sullivan, O. P.

