

Current History Notes

EUROPE

RUSSIA.—Stalin has said, 'One must explain the harmfulness of religion to the young with patience, and give them a materialistic outlook as the only scientific one.' The attitude of dictators towards religion, and that of all who think in terms of narrow nationalism and the totalitarian state, is explained by the fact that they have created false gods, and their heralds, like Nebuchadnezzar's, have cried aloud, 'To you it is commanded, O people . . . that at the time ye hear the sound of the cornet . . . ye fall down and worship the image set up' but, 'there fell a voice from heaven saying, "O King Nebuchadnezzar . . . they shall drive thee from men . . . and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men."' The final solution is not dictatorship, but mutual goodwill among Christian men, and goodwill and co-operation in all true progress will follow if men are Christian, and only then.

SPAIN.—The Spanish ambassador in London said some time ago that the Government was determined 'to see that non-Catholics were no longer treated as third-class Spaniards.'

When the Roman Catholic Church in Africa seeks to create the impression that Natives are not loyal to the governing power unless they become Roman Catholics it is an accessory to the narrow nationalism which is the curse of the world to-day.

GERMANY.—In Germany, sin is being defined as a violation of Hitler's laws. Ludendorf regards Christianity as a disease which destroys virility, and describes the Bible as the 'Great horror.' The Bishop of Chelmsford says that the world is getting hardened to cruelty, that human nature is becoming brutalized, and that civilization, divorced from Christianity, is the gravest danger to humanity.

FAR EAST

CHINA.—Elsewhere in this number we have indicated the change which has come over China in its relation to Christianity. We well remember, in our early days in China, being horrified, depressed and disgusted by some of the scurrilous and sacrilegious pictures which were circulated in mockery of Christianity. The characters for the words 'Lord' and 'pig' are somewhat similar in pronunciation, and coloured pictures were distributed which portrayed Christ as a pig, nailed to the Cross, while immodest groups surrounded the Cross as worshippers. Imagine all this and then read the extracts from the inspiring Easter message of Chiang Kai-shek, China's great national leader. After relating his capture, which was

WORLD DOMINION

described in our last number¹, he said that he asked for a Bible from his captors, 'and that was the only thing I asked for. I asked for a Bible in my solitude and I had ample opportunity for reading and meditation. The love of Christ pressed upon me with new inspiration, increasing my strength to struggle against evil and overcome temptation and to uphold righteousness. I am indeed grateful to all my fellow Christians who continually offered prayers on my behalf during my imprisonment, and I am deeply conscious of the strong spiritual support, for which I extend my hearty thanks to all Christians, and to which before you all to-day I testify, that the name of God may be glorified.' He went on to say that he wished to express some of the lessons he had learned. He found the thought of Christ on the Cross crying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!' often recurring. 'On every hand during my captivity I was beset by danger, but I had no thought of yielding to the pressure put upon me. My faith in Christ increased. I distinctly recalled the forty days and nights that Christ passed in the wilderness, withstanding temptation. His prayers in the garden of Gethsemane, the indignities heaped upon Him at the trial, and the prayers He offered for His enemies on the Cross, were with me all my days. . . . No more valuable lesson has yet come to me out of my Christian experience than to realize that the life of Christ reveals a long record of affliction, with His love and His tenderness shining through it all.'

It is no wonder that there is an atmosphere of confidence and hope in China in these days.

A correspondent in south-west China spent two months tramping through the mountains of western Kwangsi. Eight aboriginal tribes were visited, most of whom had never before seen a missionary. Treated as inferiors by their Chinese conquerors, they readily respond to friendliness and kindness. After thirty years of missionary work in the south China field, it has been a startling discovery to find that there were so many tribes and peoples who have never heard the Gospel. By sharing their homes, food, and camp-fires the way was prepared to tell them of the Gospel, and portions of Scripture and Christian literature were left with them.

INDIA.—The Rev. Alexander McLeish, who has recently returned from an extensive tour of India, says that just at a time when the opportunity of advance was never so great, missions and churches in India were never so crippled in men and resources. The opportunity that India presents to-day will be a very severe test to the faith of the home churches and the mission boards and the older Christian Church in India, if it is to be at all adequately

¹ 'Capture of Chiang Kai-shek' by George A. Young, WORLD DOMINION, April, 1937.

CURRENT HISTORY NOTES

followed up. We hear the word 'crisis' so often to-day that it has almost lost its significance, but, if there ever was a crisis, this certainly is one.

JAPAN.—The end of last century and the early years of this saw the beginnings of political changes of vast importance. In the nineties Japan defeated China, Russia took Port Arthur and Japan annexed Formosa; then the rivalry between Russia and Japan began. Russia, following her old desire for the open sea and an open port, began to dominate Manchuria and extend into Korea. This brought on the Russo-Japanese War. Then, having brought Russian expansion to an end, to the relief and gratification of China, Japan missed a priceless opportunity of earning China's eternal gratitude. Had Japan said to China, 'Now you need no longer fear Russia, Manchuria is yours once more, let us enter into a pact of friendly co-operation in Eastern Asia,' she would have created goodwill instead of hatred, which the opposite course has gendered. There would then have been great possibilities of friendly economic expansion. 'Expert friendship' among nations would create a new social order. This scrap of history may serve as a background to the present situation.

Japan's urge for expansion, Russia's growing strength, the new unity in China, what does all this hold for the future? According to the *Mainichi*, the Government of Japan has decided to abandon the proposal for joint defence against Communism in north China, and other political demands which the former Cabinet endeavoured to press on Nanking in the Sino-Japanese negotiations, and confine its attention to the negotiations to be conducted hereafter in inducing China to reduce customs duties on Japanese goods.

Vital changes are taking place in Japan. For the first time in the constitutional history of the country, the Government has gone down in defeat almost immediately following the general election. Prince Konoyo, the President of the House of Peers, a comparatively young man, was commanded by the Emperor to form a new cabinet. This he proceeded to do. His idea of a powerful national cabinet, supported by the co-operation of all political parties, has been hailed with general satisfaction.

In the midst of these political changes it is instructive to mark the comments of various Japanese papers on the situation, and the importance they attach to Great Britain as a conciliatory force. Japan apparently is now seeking the co-operation of Great Britain for the economic development and political appeasement of the Far East. In return for British recognition of her special economic and strategic position in the Far East, it is thought that Japan, for her part, may be willing to pledge the territorial integrity of China,

WORLD DOMINION

and assist her financial rehabilitation in co-operation with Britain, America and France.

Japanese thinkers clearly perceive, however, the difficulties inherent in the situation. Manchukuo, the East Hopeh Autonomous Anti-Communist Council, the North China invasion, all are obstacles to Anglo-Japanese friendship, for their recognition would let down China and estrange the United States. Moreover, Japanese military influence prevents a *détente*, for it will not permit any change of policy which can be construed as a surrender of Japan's interests, nor tolerate any diplomatic victory over Japan.

China is becoming a formidable protagonist in this chaotic complication. The *Miyako*, in a recent article, points out that China is trying to befriend Britain in order to offer stronger resistance to Japan, and her hostile attitude to Japan may be expected to be more pronounced as she forges her ties of friendship with Great Britain. Japan's relations with China, therefore, cannot be improved without also improving her relations with Great Britain.

KOREA.—The 'Shrine Question' has hindered the quiet growth of the church, and continues to perturb many. Missionary opinion is divided. Many accept the Governor General's statement that attendance of scholars at the shrines does not constitute a religious act, but simply a patriotic service for the promotion of the national spirit. Others, and these are in the majority, maintain that the services are religious, notwithstanding the official statement. Much will depend upon the action of the Korean National Churches, though a concerted decision is not easy, as meetings to discuss the question are not permitted by the authorities.

The missions that have decided to withdraw from secular educational work have over 25,000 pupils in their schools. The present provision made by the Government is for the education of about twenty per cent of the children only of school age. The loss, therefore, to pupils, to the Church, and also to the State, by missions withdrawing from school work, is not easily estimated.

INNER MONGOLIA.—Safety for travel in missionary work continues in Jehol Province, without molestation of any kind. Mission school work throughout Manchukuo faces difficulties with the Government. Compromise has seemed a way out to some, but if Christian educational institutions could take a united and firm stand, they would probably be respected by the Government and compelled to do nothing against their consciences. If the Government could be wholly persuaded that Christianity was absolutely opposed to Communism, permission would probably be given for all schools to function according to Christian standards and denominational beliefs.

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(90 SUCH PARISHES IN 1936)

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* * * * *

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WORLD DOMINION

NEAR EAST

ARABIA.—Aden began a new career as a Colony, on the 1st April. This 'Outer Gateway of India,' through which ships emerging from Suez pass without cessation on their way to India, has acquired a new importance since Italy's conquest of Abyssinia has placed her athwart the Red Sea route to the East. The transfer of Aden from the Government of India to the Colonial Office was accompanied by important Ordinances, among which were those which gave prominence to the granting of the fullest religious liberty, a measure which may have increasing significance in East Africa. The coming of the Standard Oil Company to Arabia has been both a help and a hindrance to missions: a help in that it has provided employment for boys from the mission school and remuneration for medical service rendered to its employees by the mission, and a hindrance in that it has created entirely new difficulties. The Arabs were surprised to find that all Europeans and Americans were not so keen on religion as the missionaries, although they treated them well. This has tended to produce a more worldly attitude on the part of some of the young Moslems, who, as a result, are harder to teach about the things of God. They have yet to learn that 'Christian' and 'European' or 'American' are not necessarily interchangeable terms.

TURKEY.—The Minister of the Interior is preparing a Bill for the reform of Turkish villages. Part of this scheme is the linking of small or scattered villages under collective management and planned control, which will permit the increase of revenue for purposes of development. As eighty-seven per cent of the population live in villages, the improvement of these is vital to the welfare of the State. There is also room for reform in the educational system, for, although the number of pupils has increased greatly, there has been no increase in the number of teachers. It is very difficult to get enough teachers for village schools. The number of girls in the schools (who formerly were not educated at all) is now nearing that of the boys.

AFRICA

ABYSSINIA.—It is felt in Roman Catholic circles that the two chief obstacles to Roman Catholicism in Abyssinia are the activities of the numerous Protestant sects and the relentless efforts of Islam. Great emphasis is laid on the right of priority of Italian missionaries, as 'the only real help can come from Rome, "Seat of the Representative of Christ and palladium of Christianity."' The Vicar Apostolic in Asmara (Eritrea) appeals for more money for missions and churches in Abyssinia. He says that they do not now need so many

FAMOUS MEN AND THE BIBLE

During recent months the opinions of a number of famous men concerning the Bible have been quoted—men famous as statesmen, poets, novelists, historians, essayists, and reformers. These tributes to the value of the Scriptures go to show that the Bible does not fail to make its appeal to men of keen intellect, strong personality and broad sympathies.

But if the Bible calls forth the veneration of such great figures as those whose views have been cited, it is equally true to say that it meets the needs of ordinary men and women.

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WORLD DOMINION

images, as a copy of nearly every saint of importance has been sent for the protection of Abyssinia. The Vatican is greatly pleased that the Italian Government has advanced considerable funds for providing necessities of worship and the building of new churches in Abyssinia.

Respect for all religions was guaranteed in the Constitution promulgated for Italian East Africa in June last year, but the Moslems were promised special privileges. The repair of their mosques, schools and religious institutions has been facilitated. This helpfulness has not, however, been extended to the Coptic Christian Church. Both the Moslems and Roman Catholics are actively engaged in destroying the Coptic Christianity of the Amharic tribes of Abyssinia. It has been pointed out that Signor Mussolini may well say that he is the Defender of Islam, for Italy, a Christian nation has conquered another Christian nation and is giving power and prestige to Moslems who were subjects of that nation.

TRIPOLI.—The new road which now runs from the Egyptian frontier to the Tunisian frontier, a distance of 1,200 miles, would seem only to be justified on military grounds, unless there is an intensive colonizing effort. When the Egyptian section is finished there will be a through route across northern Africa from the Nile to the Atlantic. This Italian effort of road-making has employed 13,000 men, 22 engineers and 500 overseers for a year, and has cost £1,120,000. Before opening this great road, the Duce was described by Marshal Balbo as 'the common Mother of all the Mediterranean peoples, who has carried his people to imperial heights with his last brilliant victory over the Lion of Judah.'

EGYPT.—Efforts are being made to attract students to the El Azhar University from all parts of the world. Selected preachers are to be sent out to strengthen the faith of Moslems in other countries and to propagare Islam among non-Moslems, and bursaries are given to students from other countries who cannot afford to pay. On the other hand, an article in an Egyptian paper (*Musawwar*) complains that 'most Egyptian households, especially those in "high life" have no prayer-carpet and no copy of the Koran, and do not know what these are.'

ANTI-SEMITISM

Attacks on the Jews by the press of Poland continue to increase. An inflammatory pamphlet distributed at the Warsaw High School reads: 'Students! Do not hesitate to be brutal! If you meet a Jew, hit him in the teeth with an iron bar.' Anti-Semitism is rising in Portugal, Rumania, Italy, and Lithuania.