

THE CONVERSION OF INDIA

THE
CONVERSION OF INDIA

FROM PANTÆNUS TO THE PRESENT TIME

A.D. 193-1893

By GEORGE SMITH, C.I.E., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF THE LIVES OF CAREY, OF HENRY MARTYN, OF DUFF, OF WILSON,
OF HISLOP, OF SOMERVILLE, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THE first of the Churches of the Reformation to become missionary was that of the Netherlands. The Dutch colony of New Netherlands, in North America, lasted from the year 1609 to 1664. In 1628 the first congregation was organised on Manhattan Island, now New York. That was the earliest to work among the Red Indians. What is now known as the Reformed (Dutch) Church of the United States of America has, moreover, established one of the most remarkable missions in British India, the Arcot Mission. In 1888 one of the elders of that Church, Mr. Nathan F. Graves, of Syracuse, N.Y., wrote to the late W. V. B. Mabon, D.D., Professor in its Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, N.J.: "I understand there is no Seminary or Professorship of Missions in the United States." The result was the establishment, by that benefactor, of a foundation like the Boyle Lecture of England, on which, in 1864, the late Dean Merivale delivered in the Chapel Royal, Whitehall, eight lectures on the Conversion of the Roman Empire, and, in 1865, eight lectures on the Conversion of the Northern Nations.

The writer has selected as the subject of the fifth course of Graves lectures, THE CONVERSION OF INDIA. This volume contains a somewhat fuller treatment of that

question, historically and practically, than was possible in the six lectures which he was appointed to deliver in the first fortnight of October 1893. But the book is only an outline of the past history and of the process which is going on before our eyes in India.

The previous courses, on the same foundation, were delivered, in 1889, by six distinguished American missionaries on their own missions: in 1890 by Rev. John Hall, D.D., LL.D., of New York, on Missions from Apostolic to Modern Times; in 1891 by Rev. Arthur T. Pierson, D.D., formerly of Philadelphia, on The Divine Enterprise of Missions; and in 1892 by Rev. A. J. Gordon, D.D., of Boston, on the Holy Spirit in Missions.

NAPIER ROAD, MERCHISTON,
EDINBURGH, *13th October 1893.*

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APPENDIX

THE FINDING OF THE NESTORIAN TABLET

THE work of the Jesuit missionary, Alvarez Semedo, referred to on page 19, was translated into English and published in London in 1655.¹ It is now so rare that we append that part of chapter 31, "Of the Christian Religion planted many Ages since in China : and of a very ancient Stone lately discovered there, which is an admirable Testimonie thereof," which describes the finding :—

"When the *Tartars* conquered *China* there were many *Christians* who had sumptuous Churches, being much favoured by them, as appeareth by the relation of *Paulus Venetus*. Afterward when *Humvu* endeavoured to regain the Kingdom, and made warre upon the *Tartars*, the *Moores* tooke part with the *Chinenses*, and lent them their assistance for the gaining of the Kingdom, and of the victory which they obtained, in acknowledgement whereof they were allowed to remaine in *China*, with libertie of their Religion and of their *Mosches*. The *Christians*

¹ "The History of that great and renowned Monarchy of China. Wherein all the particular Provinces are accurately described : as also the Dispositions, Manners, Learning, Lawes, Militia, Government, and Religion of the People. Together with the Traffick and Commodities of that Countrey. Lately written in *Italian* by F. Alvarez Semedo, a *Portughess*, after he had resided twenty two yeares at the Court, and other Famous Cities of that Kingdom. Now put into *English* by a Person of quality, and illustrated with several Mapps and Figures, to satisfie the curious, and advance the trade of Great *Brittain*. To which is added the History of the late Invasion and Conquest of that flourishing Kingdom by the *Tartars*. With an exact Account of the other affairs of *China*, till these present times. London : Printed by *E. Tyler* for *John Crook*, and are to be sold at his Shop at the Sign of the Ship in *S. Pauls Church-yard*, 1655."

inclined to the *Tartars*, and they being overcome in that warre, the *Christians* also were deprived of their *Estates*, and some being slain, others changing their Religion, others flying and hiding themselves in secret places, in a short time, all signe and memory of our Religion perished, so that it was not possible for us to discover anything, with all the diligence we used to that purpose.

“To conclude, we remained very disconsolate in the midst of so great darknesse, when it pleased *The only fountaine of light* to draw us out of this *obecuritie* with a most clear *Testimony*, that the *Gospel* had flourished there many ages since: *The thing fell out thus.*

“In the year 1625, as they were digging the foundation for to erect a certain building neere to the City of *Siganfu*, the Capitall Citie of the Province of *Xemsi*, the workemen lighted upon a table of stone about nine palmes long, and more than foure in breadth, and above one palme in thicknesse. The top of it, (that is, one of the extremities, or ends, of the length thereof,) endeth in the forme of a Pyramid, above two palmes in height, and above one palmes breadth at the Basis. On the plaine of this Pyramid, there is a well form'd *Crosse*, the extremities whereof end in flower-delucees, after the fashion of that *Crosse*, which is reported to have been found graved on the Sepulchre of the Apostle *S. Thomas* in the Towne of *Meliapor*, and as they were anciently painted in *Europe*, of which there are some yet to be seen at this day.

“This *Crosse* is encompassed, as it were, with certain clouds, and at the foot thereof were three *Traverse* lines, each consisting of three great letters, being all such as are commonly used in *China*, very fairly graven: with the same sort of letters is engraven the whole *Superficies* of the stone, as also the thicknesse thereof, the which notwithstanding differeth from the rest, in that some of the letters graven thereon, are *forraine*, neither were they knowne here at the first finding of it.

“Scarcely had the *Chisnesses* discovered and cleansed this notable piece of *Antiquitie*, when excited by the fervour of their naturall curiosity, they ranne to the Governour to give him notice of it, who being much joyed at this newes, presently came to see it, and caused it to be placed upon a faire *Pedestall*, under a small *Arch*, sustained by pillars at each end thereof, and open at the sides, that it might be both defended from the

injuries of the weather, and also feast the eyes of such as are true Lovers of venerable Antiquity. He caused it also to be set within the circuit of a Temple belonging to the *Bonzi*, not farre from the place where it was taken up.

“There was a wonderfull concourse of people to see this stone, partly for the Antiquity thereof, and partly for the novelty of the strange Characters, which was to be seen thereon: and as the knowledge of our Religion is at this day very much spread abroad in *China*, a *Gentile*, who was a great friend unto a grave Christian *Mandarine* named *Leo*, being present there, presently understood the mystery of that writing, and believing it would be very acceptable to his friend, sent him a copy thereof, although he was distant above a month and a halfe voyage, the *Mandarine* dwelling in the City of *Hamcheu*, whither our fathers had retired themselves, by reason of the former persecution, whereof we shall speak in its proper place. This copy was received with a spirituall *Jubilee*, and many exteriour demonstrations of joy, as an irrefragable Testimony of the *Ancient Christianity* in *China*, which had been so much desired and sought after: for no lesse was contained in this writing, as we shall shew anon.

“Three years after in the year 1628 some of our fathers went into that Province in the company of a *Christian Mandarine*, who had occasion to go thither. They founded a Church and house in the capitall City thereof for the service of our good God, that he, who was pleased to discover so precious a memoriall of the possession taken in that Country by his divine law, would also facilitate the restitution thereof in the same place. It was my good fortune to be one of the first, and I esteemed it a happy abode, in that I had the opportunity to see the stone, and being arrived I took no thought for any thing else. I saw it and read it, and went often to read, behold, and consider it at leisure, and above all, I did much admire, that being so ancient, it should be so entire, and have the letters so plainly and neatly graven.

“On the thicknes of the sides thereof, it hath many *Chinese* letters, which containe many names of the *Priests* and *Bishops* of that time. There are also many other letters, which were not then knowne, for they are neither Hebrew nor Greek: and (for as much as I now understand) they containe the same names, that if peradventure some strangers might not under-

stand the letters of the Countrey, they might perhaps be better acquainted with those of a forraigne extraction.

“Passing by *Cochine* I came to *Cranganor*, where is the *Residence* of the *Archbishop* of *Costa*, to consult about these letters with father *Antoni Fernandes* one of our societie, who is very skilfull in the books and writings of those ancient Christians converted by *S. Thomas*. He told me the letters were *Syriack*, and the very same which are used there at this day.”

Further accounts of the Nestorian Tablet will be found in Nieuhoff's narrative of the Dutch East India Company's embassy to the Emperor of China in 1655, Englished by John Ogilby in 1673 (2nd ed.), and in Du Halde's *Description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary*, of which an English translation appeared in two folios in 1741.

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