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978-1-108-00833-4 - Cardinal Lavigerie and the African Slave Trade

Edited by Richard F. Clarke

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Cardinal Lavigerie and the African Slave Trade

In 1889 the Jesuit Richard F. Clarke published this biography of Charles Lavigerie (1825–1892), the French cardinal and Primate of Africa. From the moment of his arrival in Algeria in 1868, Lavigerie became a key, if sometimes controversial, figure in organising Catholic missions in Africa. In 1874 he founded the Society of Missionaries for Africa, otherwise known as the White Fathers after the white Arab dress they wore. Lavigerie's later career was devoted to the battle against slavery and in 1888 he conducted a campaign in several European capitals denouncing the practice. Clarke's book, which appeared a year after Lavigerie's visit to London, provides an account of the cardinal's career in France and Africa up to that date. It emphasises and praises Lavigerie's anti-slavery message, referring to him in the preface as 'the apostle of the slaves of all Africa.'

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P R E F A C E



ENGLAND has for a century and more taken her place in the forefront of the anti-slavery crusade. She has long since abolished slavery in all countries under her own sway. She has rejoiced over its abolition in the United States of America; her cruisers keep guard along the African coast to prevent, if possible, or at least to check, the export of slaves from thence: it is her earnest desire to penetrate into the heart of the African continent itself, and destroy the traffic in human flesh, with all its accompanying miseries.

Various circumstances have hitherto combined to defeat her designs of mercy. The conflicting interests of the European Powers and the mutual hostility of Continental nations have rendered impossible the united action which alone could produce a permanent effect. The complications of the Eastern Question have entangled the position in Northern Africa. But, above all, the fierce opposition of Mohammedanism to any European interference with its career of conquest and of crime has succeeded in frustrating the efforts of the liberator, even when nominally supported by a Mohammedan Government. One expedition after another has failed in the face of the deadly enmity of the Crescent

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to the Cross, and of the double-dealing, rapacity, and corruption of Egyptian officials in the Soudan and on the Upper Nile.

What has long been needed for the uprooting of the traffic which degrades and depopulates Africa, and inflicts on her children revolting cruelties and sufferings that call out to heaven for vengeance, is an Apostle. A man fired with the love of God and his fellow-men can work wonders and attain results that diplomacy and conferences and the action of the Powers can never accomplish. Such a man must, of necessity, have a difficult, it may be an apparently impossible, task. He can scarcely expect himself to witness the success of his work. He may pass to his reward with the end apparently as far off as ever. He is certain to meet with every sort of discouragement, opposition, abuse, and ridicule. He will be regarded as a visionary, an enthusiast, perhaps as a charlatan and an impostor. But if he himself is defeated, his cause will ultimately triumph. If he has to sacrifice himself for the cause of the slave, the sacrifice will be accepted as the condition of Africa's redemption from her present bondage.

Such an apostle, or one whom we may hope that God has chosen for the apostolate, is the subject of the following memoir. The name of Cardinal Lavigerie is already familiar to Englishmen. He has visited England and given a fresh stimulus to her zeal in the cause of the slave. He is at the present time struggling against difficulties enough to dishearten any ordinary man. Jealousy, animosity, suspicion, the accusation of political and self-interested motives, are doing their worst to ruin his work. His proposal of

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PREFACE

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a Congress at Lucerne was unfortunately rendered impossible by the French elections, which were impending at the time. He has been accused of postponing it in order that France might dominate at its assemblies, and of being actuated by a desire to place other countries at a disadvantage to his own.

It is difficult to refute such charges as these; but the fact that the programme of his opponents is that which he had already determined upon, independently of the representations of his assailants, is the clearest proof of his disinterested motives, and of his devotion not to any national or political interests, but to the interests of our common humanity and to the cause of God.

Yet the following pages are perhaps the best evidence of what are the aims of Cardinal Lavigerie and the spirit that has actuated his life. His noble self-devotion is not the growth of a day or a year. It is the growth of a lifetime spent in the service of God and of his fellow-men. In his episcopate in France he was the apostle of his diocese. In Algeria he was the apostle of the Arabs, and that under circumstances which rendered his apostolate a most difficult one. At the present moment he is the apostle of the slaves of all Africa. Many may doubt the possibility of success in the crusade that he is preaching throughout Europe. Some may regard any sort of armed interference as likely to do more harm than good. Some there are whose practical acquaintance with Africa has led them to believe that it is from the English settlements on the Western Coast that the work must be begun; since there, and there alone, the power of Islam is not yet

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dominant. But all must allow that there is no man living who has the power to effect the regeneration of Africa that is at present in the hands of Cardinal Lavigerie, and that, if the Congress of European Powers is to take any active steps for the suppression of slavery, they must listen to his counsels and avail themselves of his personal knowledge of the country and the people to whose cause he has devoted himself from the first day that he set foot upon the soil of Africa.

In presenting this account of Cardinal Lavigerie's life and labours, we have to acknowledge our indebtedness to Mgr. Grussenmeyer's interesting book, *Vingt-cinq années d'épiscopat en France et en Afrique*.

R. F. C.

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