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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

ENGLISH  
MISSIONARIES  
IN  
MADAGASCAR.

THE hostility shown by the French Press to Mr. Shaw, the English missionary whom Admiral Pierre treated so cavalierly, is not in the least to be explained by the fact that he was engaged in ministering to the Hovas as a Protestant pastor.

The French have long looked, and probably with

good reason, on the English missionaries as the rulers of the Hovan realm, and, therefore, in attacking them they naturally consider that they are carrying the war into the very inmost headquarters of the enemy. M. George Valbert, for example, told us in a recent number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that these missionaries had succeeded, by prodigies of industry and activity in making themselves masters as well of the Government as of the consciences of the people in question.—After having preached Jesus and peace, he adds in effect, the English missionaries in Madagascar inflamed dissension and war. Having had the happiness of converting the Hovas, they encouraged them to reduce their neighbours to vassalage. Whoever interferes with their catechumens ranges himself against the Lord, and they at once adopted the unjust cause of the Hovas when, disowning the rights of France, they became embroiled with her.—It is not the fault of the missionaries, in a word, if England and France have not had recourse to hostilities in order to settle the matter.—The missionaries, nevertheless, do not belong to the Anglican Church.—Members of the High Church party, the writer informs us, would consider it beneath them to visit these missionaries on arriving at Tananarivo. They do not look upon them as gentlemen, which, however, does not prevent their considering them useful subalterns, whom they would be the first to recommend to the protection of the Foreign Office, if they found them to be interfered with—and that although, as he tells us, they would not exchange with them what he calls, in a form of expression that defies all attempts at translation—*des shake hands*. The missionaries have, indeed, done these people some good; they have succeeded in weaning them from certain barbarous and cruel practices, and they are trying to put an end to slavery; they have, moreover, conferred great benefits by their influence on English merchants. If they had been content only to teach their converts that when two friends meet it is more reasonable for them to touch one another's hand than to rub the nose of the one against that of the other, commerce would not have been much the better for their teaching.—But they taught them to reform their dress, and, instead of a garment called a *lamba* in which they were used to clothe themselves, that they should don—the women each a cotton gown, the men a shirt and trousers. For English missionaries are very frank, and do not hide that they mingle heavenly things with worldly interests, and a spirit of business with piety.—Mr. Sibree, in fact, a writer on Madagascar, computes from statistics that since the introduction of Christianity into Polynesia, each missionary has been worth, to American and European commerce, ten thousand pounds sterling a year. The missionaries in Madagascar, indeed, have not reached so high a sum, but their value may fairly be fixed at two or three thousand pounds of annual importation.—It was in 1869 that the English missionaries carried the day. In the February of that year the Queen Ranavalona II. was publicly baptised by them, together with her Prime Minister, and she immediately sent messengers through all the villages to announce that she had chosen her religion. The effect of the ukase was immediate; the people rushed to baptism, and the whole province of Imerina which had been fetichist in the morning, in the evening had become Christian. As to what the conversion is worth the missionaries know it, and Mr. Sibree makes no mystery concerning it. Sometimes the news is spread abroad that the Queen is about to change her mind, and immediately the chapels that have been crowded are left empty.—Ranavalona is, nevertheless, a puppet whose Richelieu holds the wires.—The Government of the Hovas is an absolute monarchy tempered by the omnipotence of a Prime Minister, who obliges his sovereign to say and do only what pleases him, and he, in his turn, desires nothing without first having

consulted those who converted him. His queen is the prisoner of a prisoner.—But whatever may be the merits of the missionaries, they are still men, and puffed up by their success they abused it. They determined to rule without any partners, and decided that France must be expelled. They had forgotten that if they were installed at Tananarivo since 1820, the French had had interests in Madagascar for at least two centuries—that they possessed the Isle of Nossibé on the north-west coast, that of St. Mary on the east coast, that they had always stipulated for their countrymen and colonists at Bourbon the right of settlement in the Hovan country, and that by the treaties of 1841 the Sakalavas had recognised their protectorate, which they had themselves solicited.—The writer further goes on to charge the missionaries with having persuaded the Hovas to set France at defiance owing to her altered position in Europe.—They persuaded the Prime Minister, he says, that since the disasters she had suffered, France is no longer France, that, like the lion loaded with years, she is reduced by them to weep for her former prowess, and in her weakness feels insults no more, that were she to become incensed, England and Germany would lend the strong hand to her insulter. Under such circumstances, and such being the opinions common among the French, we cannot wonder at the treatment given to Mr. Shaw, nor at the angry tone of the French Press in writing on the subject.—The wonder is, perhaps, that the Government of the Republic undertook to make him any amends for the hardships he suffered.

A HORRIBLE  
STATE OF  
THINGS.

A FEW years ago an English prelate—the Arch-

bishop of Canterbury, indeed, if we recollect aright—having referred to the heathenism of India at some meeting in London, was replied to, and his utterances criticised in a very unexpected manner

by some heathen natives of the country referred to. We do not say that the Archbishop had the worst of the argument, for that would be to admit a form of Christianity to be lower than heathenism, which we are not prepared to do, but it was at least proved that, whatever may have been the beliefs of the pagans who took up the defence of their own religious system, they were very capable of judging as to the weaknesses apparent in the creed the Archbishop would have propagated among their fellow-countrymen. It was, besides, somewhat startling to find that in the capital, where such loud boasts are wont to be heard as to the missionary work done by England, heathendom made bold to lift its voice? A somewhat similar incident is reported by the *Aryus* to have taken place lately at a meeting of the Melbourne Presbytery—although in this instance we conclude, the foreigner referred to is a Christian—but he also appears to have a due appreciation of matters, and to perceive that the reforming work Christians are called upon to do does not lie wholly without the boundaries of what is called Christendom:—"Mr. Cheok Hong Cheong appeared as a commissioner from the Fitzroy congregation in support of a call. Mr. Cheong has been walking about with his eyes open, and the result of his observations is that he has arrived at the conclusion that Fitzroy presents a vast field for missionary enterprise. Several venerable members of the Court arched their eye-brows at this unlooked-for announcement of the shrewd Celestial, but their astonishment was intensified when Mr. Cheong proceeded to express his conviction that there were more heathens in Fitzroy than on any island in the New Hebrides. The young ministers smiled significantly, but the 'fathers of the Church' looked grave, for the conversion of the New Hebrides is one of their pet projects. The inferential suggestion that the missionaries sent to the New Hebrides would be more usefully employed within a mile or two of Collins street was evidently not relished by the 'fathers and brethren,' and the plain-spoken Celestial sat down in silence.' Now we confess that the fact of Melbourne's being a very wicked city, and containing streets and districts where a very abominable condition of things may obtain, is not wholly conclusive against the sending of missionaries among people who do not profess to be Christians. It would, for example, have been a poor reason for keeping St. Francis Xavier from going out to convert the East to have pleaded that a great part of Europe had turned its back upon the Faith, and that until it was regained for the Church, nothing ought