

75. When China was re-occupied by the Jesuit Missions in the end of the sixteenth century the impression of the missionaries at first was that no Christianity had ever existed in China before their own day. Ricci must in any case have modified that opinion when he arrived at the conclusion that China was the Cathay of Marco Polo; but he also met before his death with unexpected evidence of its having survived, in however degenerate a form, almost to his own time. Its professors he was informed had been numerous in the northern provinces, and had gained distinction both in arms and literature. But some sixty years before (*i.e.* about 1540) a persecution against them had arisen which had driven all, or nearly all, to abandon or conceal their profession. At a later date a member of the Jesuit company visited the cities in which the descendants of these people were said to exist, furnished with the names of the families. But none of them would admit any knowledge of the subject on which he spoke.¹

Some years afterwards also the Jesuit Samedo chanced on faint traces of former Christianity in the neighbourhood of the chief city of Kiangsi.²

Some material relics also bearing like evidence came in the course of the seventeenth century into the hands of the Jesuit missionaries, such as a bell with a cross and Greek inscription, and at Changcheu in Fokien sculptures of the Virgin, marble crosses, and the like. More than one mediæval MS. of the Scriptures was also met with, but as these were Latin they must have been relics of the Franciscan missions of John Montecorvino and his brethren rather than of the Nestorians.³

¹ *Trigautius, De Exped. Christianâ apud Sinas*, bk. i, ch. 11.

² *Samedo, Rel. della Cina*, 1643, p. 195. It does not seem necessary to do more than allude to the story told by Ferdinand Mendez Pinto of his coming on a Christian village on the canal between Nanking and Peking; the inhabitants of which were descended from converts made one hundred and forty-two years before (*i.e.*, about 1400) by one Matthew Escandel of Buda in Hungary, a hermit of Mount Sinai; all the history of which was shown to Ferdinand in a printed book (language not specified) by the people of the village! (ch. xcvi).

³ *Trigautius, u.s.*; *Martini's Atlas Sinensis*; *Baldello Boni, Introd. to Il Milione*. One of these relics, a Latin Bible of the eleventh century,