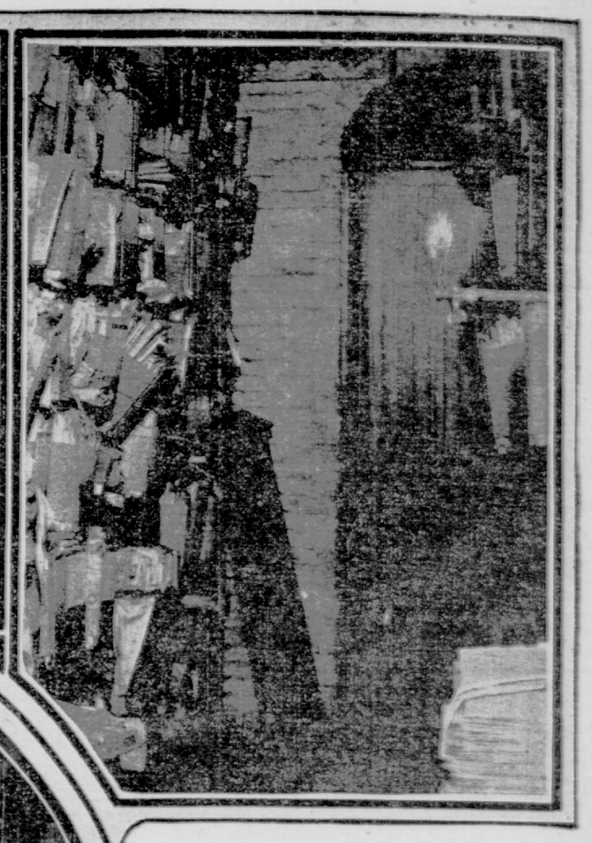
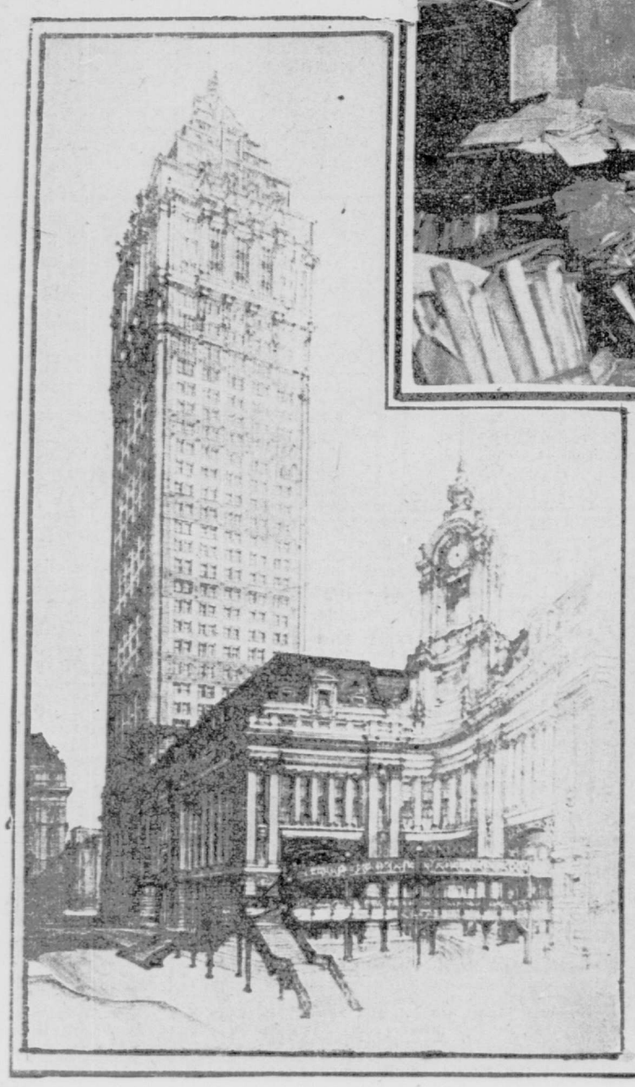
IMPORTANT CITY RECORDS In Perpetual DANGER of FIRE

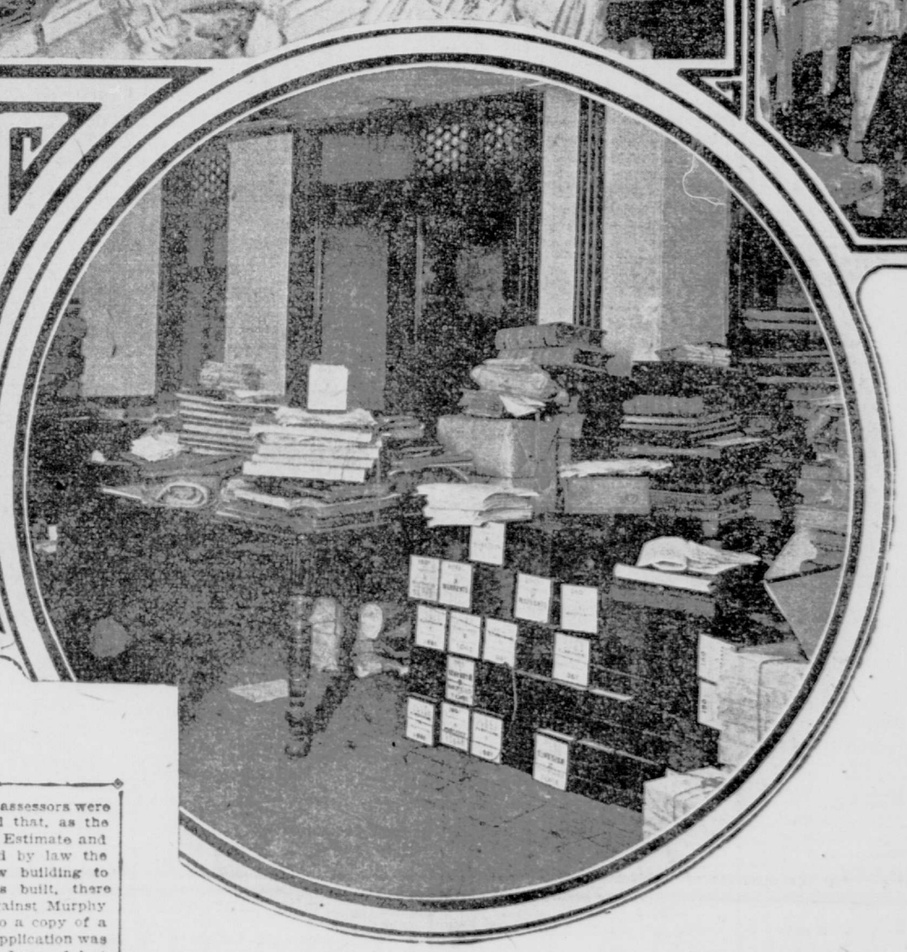
PUBLIC OFFICIALS DEMANDING Greater Safety For Them In A NEW MUNICIPAL BUILDING

PILE OF OLD PARCHMENTS ON FLOOR OF ATTIC IN THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE.
From this pile was pulled at random last week a warrant from the hand of the King of England, dated 1737.





ROOM FOR ALL THE RECORDS.
Plan suggested by Ex-Commissioner Lindenthal for a lofty municipal office building, combined with a Brooklyn Bridge terminal.



ARCHIVES OF THE BUREAU OF ASSESSMENTS AND ARREARS, IN THE STEWART BUILDING.
There are no duplicates of many of these papers. While this picture was being taken a lighted cigar stub fell through the grating from the sidewalk outside.

RECORDS OF THE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE.
Jammed together on cheap pine shelves for lack of space. The gas jet on the right is only a foot from the documents.

For several years New York has been discussing in a desultory way the question of erecting a municipal office building to house those city departments that are now occupying rented quarters at an expense to the city of hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. A bill is before the Legislature authorizing the erection of such a structure over the new bridge terminal on the Staats Zeitung block. It is included, also, among the authorized improvements in the list which was made recently by Nelson P. Lewis, chief engineer of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, the amount set aside being $3,500,000.

Not only for the convenience of the public, as well as of the departments, would a municipal building be of value, but its erection would give an opportunity to house many of the important records of the city in a fireproof structure. This refers especially to the documents in the County Clerk's office and those of the Department of Finance.

The monumental Hall of Records, recently completed at a cost of about $8,000,000, was supposed to care for these, but for some reasons as plain as the nose on one's face and for others not so clear there does not appear to be any room for these in the new building with the spacious offices and heavy bronze trimmings. According to the act which provided for this costly structure, it was intended to create "suitable accommodation for the office and use of the Register of the city and county of New York; and for the office and use of the Clerk of the city and county of New York; and for the offices and courts and for the use of the Surrogate of the city and county of New York, being the various offices in which the records affecting public interests are required by law to be kept in said city and county; and for the offices and use of the Law Department, the Finance Department and the Tax Department."

The Register, the Surrogate, the tax assessors and the Law Department and some of the old records of the Finance Department are in the building, the Law Department occupying three of the nine floors, but the important court and financial records of the city, for the protection of which the many millions were in part spent, are in constant danger of destruction by fire.

DISGRACEFUL QUARTERS.

It is only necessary to visit the archives of the County Clerk in the Tweed courthouse in City Hall Park to realize how great the need is for a fireproof place for the storage of documents having so much to do with the happiness and welfare of the inhabitants of Manhattan and The Bronx. In the unventilated cellar and the dusty attic the decrees of the courts and the papers of the adjudicated cases, extending over a period of more than a century, are piled up in seemingly haphazard fashion on rude pine shelves. Documents settling family quarrels, determining the future of children's lives and breaking up homes, material for a thousand tales as dramatic as any contained between the covers of books, lie covered with dust where a careless cigarette smoker's match might destroy them. Judgments in cases affecting the relations of the city and the public service corporations are at the mercy of the vandal and the flames.

That the court records of one of the richest cities on the face of the globe should be housed in such a place is the wonder of the visitor. The cellar where a large portion of the records are kept is reached by a spiral iron stairway. Behind this stairway on the floor lie a number of dust-covered documents for which there is no room on the shelves. Near its foot is a set of shelves for the use of the binders. On one end hang five old hats, the relics of five men who once worked there, but who have died. The survivors believe that their deaths were hastened by working in the cellar. They toll over the names of the former owners of the hats, pointing to the worn and dusty headpieces as they do so. With one exception, they say, all were in the prime of life, and they add that ten out of a staff which averages twenty-five have died within the last seven years. They comment on the poor ventilation because the place is below the sidewalks and the windows cannot be opened. Then there is poor plumbing. This is self-evident to the visitor, for there is an odor that reminds one of the deadly operation of rat poison. "The sewage has set back again," one of the men grimly remarks. One imagines that it would be grewsome working in the company of the string of hats and realizing that the conditions of which the hats are a relic still exist and any day may add another to the list.

The narrow brick archway beside which the hats hang opens into a dim labyrinth whose boundaries are rows of pine shelves reaching from the floor to the low ceiling. The passages would be absolutely dark were it not for flickering yellow gas lights which partially illuminate them. From floor to ceiling are packages of papers. Some of those less frequently used are covered by a gray coat of dust literally an eighth of an inch in depth. Bundles of documents lie indiscriminately upon the floor. The passages are so narrow that one wonders that papers escape catching fire when they are drawn out, by contact with the unprotected gas flames. Some are so dark that in order to find documents the men light a paper torch in the nearest gas light and when the document is found stamp the light out on the worn wooden floor. There are so many passageways that it would require many additional men in the County Clerk's office to prevent careless visitors from working their will with the documents and from throwing matches into obscure corners. Tin boxes provided for the protection of the numerous papers involved in certain prominent cases show what follows inadequate protection and storage in a place that drives away a sense of respect. Padlocks are missing and in some cases the tin covers have been bent back exposing the contents of the boxes to the dust and the chance firebrand. The guide pulls down a bundle of papers from the row close to the ceiling. The ends of the papers have the light cinnamon color of slightly scorched paper and when one of the documents is opened a number of particles break off and drop to the floor. One takes hold of the bundle and finds that it is warm to the touch. The heat from the neighboring steam pipes and gas flames is doing its work. The documents bear the date, 1787.

The attic reminds one of the garrets in old homesteads. It has the waspish odor. The floors are of rough, wide boards, with wide cracks between them. The windows are small. Quantities of papers lie about on rough shelves. At the end of one of the dimly lighted rooms on the floor are sheaves of rolled parchments. Some of these date back to the time of George I. of England.

HUNT FOR THE REASON.

A representative of The Tribune tried to find out why it was that the Law Department, instead of the County Clerk, occupied the three stories of the Hall of Records which remained after the Surrogate, the Register and the tax assessors were provided for. Tammany men hinted that, as the Mayor was the head of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, upon which devolved by law the apportionment of space in the new building to the departments for which it was built, there might be politics in it. The fight against Murphy possibly was the cause. According to a copy of a letter written by the County Clerk, application was made for space in the building in June of last year.

At the Mayor's office it was stated that it was not known why the County Clerk's office and documents were not in the Hall of Records. It had been suggested that the reason was the objection of the judges. They wished the documents kept where they could be reached at short notice without going out of the building. The clerk of the courts, when appealed to, replied shortly that he did not know anything about it, but the courthouse was the place for them. Mr. Ellison, the Corporation Counsel, said that he understood the reason to be that the courts wished the records kept in the courthouse. He added that if the County Clerk wanted a fireproof place to store the records there were good office buildings in the neighborhood where it could be secured.

A bill has been introduced in the Legislature to compel the designation of a certain amount of space in the Hall of Records for the use of the Commissioner of Records, W. S. Andrews. This place was created a year ago partly, it is said, for the purpose of giving Senator Grady a job, and partly to provide for the care of the old records of the city. Senator Grady did not get the place and Mr. Andrews has not secured space yet for his office and the housing of the records.

If fire should sweep through the Stewart Building, a structure classed as of "slow combustion," records which represent more than $20,000,000 in cash to the city would be in the path of the flames. Besides this direct cash loss to the city would be the destruction of its cash books and ledgers containing the current transactions.

Only through the records of the Collector of Assessments and Arrears can the titles to a large number of plots of New York City real estate be cleared up. The amount of the uncollected assessments upon real estate recorded in the Manhattan office is estimated at $20,000,000. At the present time there are no duplicates of the records of these "open accounts." Each assessment, unpaid tax or water charge upon a piece of real property is a lien against it. The property cannot be transferred with a clear title until the assessment is paid. Should these records be destroyed it would be difficult if not impossible to give a clear title to thousands of plots of land in this city. A month ago a force of sixty-two men was set at work making a duplicate record of the unpaid assessments in a form which will make it more easy to trace them than at present. It is estimated that it will take this group of copyists two years to make this compilation.

Records covering a period of nearly ninety years are kept in the rooms of the bureau, as it is often necessary to refer to them.

No city official, it is said, knows what the city is worth, what is the amount of its collectible bills, its assets. When Greater New York came into being all the records of assessments and arrears of taxes in the scores of communities comprising it were removed to the Stewart Building. To Controller Coler fell the task of organizing the consolidated city's bookkeeping system. He found out what the city's debts were, but the task of finding out what it was worth was one that, taken with his other duties, seemed too great to be undertaken. Controller Grout concluded that he had enough worries without trying to analyze the accounts hidden in the mass of documents. Up to the present time no Collector of Assessments and Arrears has been able to secure a release when he gave up his office, because he did not know for what he was liable. All these years the city's bookkeeping has been incomplete, owing to lack of knowledge of its assets. It has been carrying on its business as a "current account."

The documents showing the true condition of the assets of the city are in the Stewart Building. Should fire rage through its halls these papers would be swallowed with the others, adding a little to the glow on the sky, and wiping out forever the only evidence of the existence of these assets. Under the direction of Controller Metz a compilation is being made of their contents, so that ultimately the city will be able to store them in fireproof quarters, because they will not be needed in the daily routine of business.

INVALUABLE DOCUMENTS.

Among the visitors to the bureau the other day was a troubled title searcher. He had discovered that there was an assessment made in 1847 upon the piece of property which was to be transferred. There was no record in the possession of the owner indicating whether it had been paid or not.

"I am morally certain that it has been paid," said Mr. Moynahan, the Collector, with a reassuring smile. "Get the cash book for 1847 and bring it to me," he said to one of his assistants, and in due time it was revealed from the original record that it had been paid. This illustrates the importance of these papers.

Among the documents in the possession of the bureau also are the city's copies of the franchises of the public utility corporations, against which taxes amounting to millions of dollars have been levied under the terms of the Ford franchise tax bill, but not paid. The other day these were stored in wooden cases, there being no others to contain them.

The maps of street openings by which the city establishes its ownership are in equal jeopardy with the other documents.

The records which are in daily use and the only piece of city property on which "Boss" Tweed ever laid his hands that he left to the municipality, a black walnut desk, are on the main floor in a darksome dungeon beneath. Scattered on tables and stored in old closets are the older records, which have to be near at hand, but which are not referred to so frequently.

Opening out of this dimly lighted room is a passageway running along the side of the building under the sidewalk on Reade street. On the other side of this passage one sees an iron vault door. Behind it, under the sidewalk, is a dark fireproof and burglar proof vault. In this gloomy hole, so large that two gas jets are required for its illumination, the officials say with a wink and a smile that are intended to signify, "Wouldn't you like to have had some of it?" A. T. Stewart used to store his wealth.

Recently some steps have been taken to protect the records of this bureau. Metal filing cases have been provided for a portion of the books and papers. The old records, as far as possible, will eventually be stored in the dusky depths of the sidewalk vault. There will still, however, be many of the older books in wooden cabinets.

On the second floor is the auditing department. It has also been fitted out with metal cases, but the rooms are small, the cases are so thin they would not resist a hot fire and enough cases cannot be put in to contain the thousands of contracts. Standing beside the cases on the floor and rising to one's shoulder are stacks of typewritten documents. In the piles are contracts for buildings, contracts for bridges, contracts for sewers, contracts for almost everything under the sun. Should they be burned the city would be wound up in a tangle of litigation involving millions of dollars.

So it is with the books and papers in the other offices. Some are stored in safes, and some are in the Hall of Records, but books whose loss would be felt for many years in the transaction of the city's business are stacked in wooden cases. While, of course, no one expects that the Stewart Building is going to be burned, yet it is possible to provide for the city's archives a safer place than they now occupy.

CITY PAYS BIG RENT.

At the present time the departments located below 14th street are paying approximately $360,000 a year in rent for office space. Upward of $100,000 goes for offices in the Park Row Building. More than $125,000 is paid by the city for quarters in the Stewart Building. The Barclay Building, almost directly across the way, receives a number of thousands of dollars in revenue from the city's coffers. This is true also of the Gerken Building. At 4 per cent this money would procure $7,250,000, a sum sufficient, it is said, to pay for a site and erect a fireproof office building of ample proportions.

The space required for the departments, as worked out by Mr. Lewis, is 216,910 square feet. He estimated that if a building of the ground area of the Barclay, at Chambers street and Broadway, were planned, it would require a structure twenty-nine stories high, or nearly as high as the Park Row Building, to accommodate the scattered municipal offices. If a building were to be placed on the Tompkins Market site, opposite Cooper Institute, it would need to be only seventeen stories high. If the irregular block bounded by Worth street, Mission Place and Park, Pearl and Centre streets, which was recommended last year as a site, were used the structure would need to be no higher than the Stewart Building, or about six stories.

If the city should acquire the property on the north side of Chambers street, between Broadway and the Hall of Records, and a building nine stories high, with a cellar and sub-cellar, were erected, it would contain two and one-half times the space which is required. The land would cost about $7,000,000, and the building slightly less than $4,500,000. The ground bounded by Park Row, Tryon Row and Centre, Reade and Duane streets, through which passes City Hall Place, that is already owned by the city and is occupied by the Staats Zeitung and minor buildings, has been suggested as the most suitable site for a municipal building. It is for the erection of a building on this site that authority is being asked at Albany. A building six stories high on this plot would accommodate the departments for which space is desired. No plans for it have yet been drawn.

Four years ago, in the Low administration, Gustav Lindenthal, Bridge Commissioner, assisted by George B. Post, as consulting architect, and H. F. Hornbostel, as architect, prepared and presented to the Board of Estimate and Apportionment an ambitious scheme for the construction of a civic centre around City Hall Park. It proposed the removal of the Postoffice and the Courthouse, the latter to be replaced by one erected on the site of the Stewart Building, and to harmonize in architecture with the Hall of Records. Between them was to be a municipal building, and on the site of the Staats Zeitung Building and the land behind it a terminal for the Brooklyn Bridge and a department office building. The latter was to be a campanile about 700 feet high. The terminal building, which was to occupy the ground on which the Staats Zeitung Building now stands, was to be slightly lower than the Hall of Records and about half the height of the new Tribune Building. Behind it was to stand the office campanile. It was estimated four years ago that the bridge terminal and campanile would cost about $5,900,000, exclusive of the land.

THE PRESIDENT'S PLEASANTRIES.

As specimens of the pleasantries which enliven the ordinary conversation of President Roosevelt the following are taken from Washington reports:

The first is apropos to the report that Secretary Taft is to succeed Chief Justice Fuller on the Supreme bench, should a vacancy occur there. The President and the members of his Cabinet were passing out of the dining room one day, when they were guests of the Chief Justice. The President stopped a moment to look at a new and very striking portrait of their host. Turning to Secretary Taft, Mr. Roosevelt said:

"Taft, just look at that! Did you ever see such vigor and health?"

All understood the reference and broke into smiles.

Passing one day through the throng at a reception given by the Vice-President, Mr. Roosevelt was stopped by a lady who wished to bring herself particularly to his remembrance, and she said:

"I am Mrs. ——, wife of the gray haired Congressman from ——."

"Any Congressman," gallantly replied the President, "whose wife has such pretty brown hair as yours can have as much gray hair as he pleases—or he need not have any hair."—World's Events Magazine.

TOO LOW!

A well-known sportsman had become very tired of listening to a series of shooting yarns that some friends had been spinning. At last he launched his first and only story that night. "I went into a field one day to have a shot," he said. "The only game in sight was an immense flock of blackbirds. I should say there were ten thousand in the flock. I fired both barrels, and how many do you think I killed?" Different guesses were made, ranging from twenty to one hundred birds. "Not one," said the stranger, "but I went out to look for results and picked up thirty bushels of legs. I had shot a little too low."—The Tatler.

"KAYSER" GLOVES
The mark to go by is "Kayser" in the hem of genuine "KAYSER" Patent Finger Tipped silk.
A guarantee ticket in every pair that the tips outwear the glove. Made of PURE silk.

HOW MISSIONARIES EXASPERATE CHINESE

By Interfering with the Administration of Civil Law by the Native Magistrates.

By William T. Ellis.

(Copyright, 1907, by Joseph B. Bowles.)

The most serious charge made against missionaries in China is that by their interference with civil law they exasperate the natives to the point of uprisings and massacres. This subject deserves the fullest investigation and most careful treatment, for it is no light thing to accuse ministers of the Gospel of being responsible for riot and murder. Yet I regret to write that I find ground for this widespread criticism.

A look at the setting of the facts is first necessary. An alien in China is not subject to China; he knows no law but that of his own self-restraint or of his country's consulate.

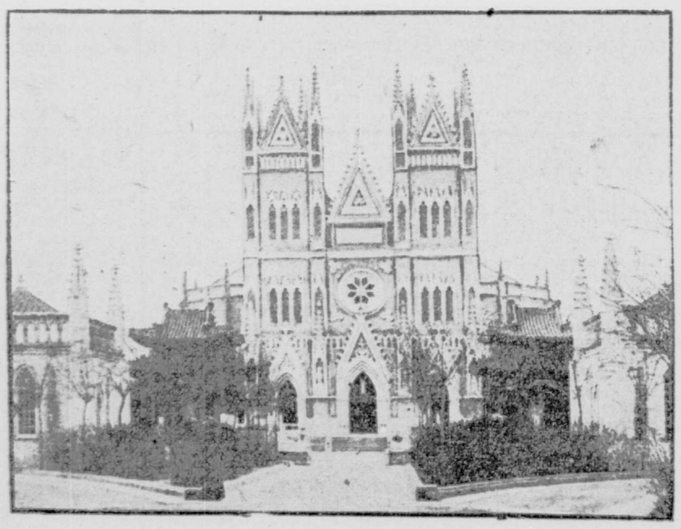
A foreigner can do pretty much as he pleases in China. Instead of being, as his friends at home imagine him to be, a terror stricken mortal, momentarily afraid that the Chinese ogre will demand his life, he is more nearly an ogre himself.

The race question in the Southern States is not half so serious as the race question in Asia. The white man's sense of superiority to the yellow expresses itself in a harshness that would shock America were it widely known. If a 'ricksha man does not go fast enough, beat him with your stick. A secretary of the American Legation at Peking told me as a joke that he broke his light cane on a coolie's shoulders. If a Chinese gets in your way, shove him aside, kick him or pull his queue. When I have seen the way the Chinese are frequently abused by white men I no longer marvel at the anti-foreign feeling which resides in most native breasts. The wonder is that the Chinese have endured so much without reprisal. For it does seem as if the natives have no rights which the foreigners are bound to respect. The present outcry against the white man in China has manifold justification.

MISSIONARIES ABOVE THE LAW.

Thus it came to pass that the French treaty gave civil rank and authority to French missionaries. There are ugly reports afloat concerning the means by which this provision was put into the document, but these do not necessarily concern the present discussion. The American and British missionaries, who would be entitled to the same rights by the "most favored nation" clause, promptly disavowed any intention of accepting them.

Not so the French. They have been openly political agents, as have also, in some cases, the Germans. The French bishop travels in the full regalia of a viceroy. When he goes out in his chair a bishop has outrunners, umbrellas, flags and all the other flummery of a Chinese governor. He demands to be received always in the state befitting his rank. Upon this point Chinese officials, high and low, have spoken to me with greatest bitterness, and so also have men in the consular and diplomatic service.



FRENCH CATHEDRAL AT PEKING.

Regardless of public opinion, the French missionaries have pressed to the limit their prerogatives. Columns could be written of the manner in which they have abused their power. Whole villages have been forcibly impressed to work for them. In the interior, a few weeks ago, I ran across a case where they had imprisoned the head men of a village.

The most trivial offence against a member of one of the French churches must be heavily atoned for. This applies not only to the national land grabbing of France and Germany on account of missionary troubles, but also to petty neighborhood squabbles. A convert of the French priest is immune from the law of his own land. He may be a murderer, a thief, a rascal of any kind or degree; his church membership is an asylum, and the law cannot touch him. The missionary alone is his judge. No outsider can have any redress against him. This has made the French churches refuges for evildoers, and it has also caused the French missionaries to be dreaded and hated by Chinese, high and low.

Matters are improving somewhat of late. The high-handedness of the French clergy has abated since the troubles in France have deprived them of the privileges of instant appeal to the French Minister at Peking. A new and better policy will probably, perforce, be adopted. The noble sacrifice of the French priests and nuns, and their tireless, selfless labors may then have their reward in the affection and esteem of the people.

WILY CHINAMEN'S WAYS.

As a rule, the American and British missionaries have followed a directly contrary policy, as the utterances of the two ministers of these nations, which I shall later quote, will show. Their general rule has been non-innterference in civil matters. Times beyond counting they have been put in a predicament by the wily Chinese, who can see an advantage to themselves long before it is on an Anglo-Saxon's horizon.

Thus many an ardent young missionary has found that a sudden accession of inquirers has been due to the fact that the professed converts wanted him to take up their side of a quarrel against members of the French Church. To join the one Church seemed to the Chinese the only recourse left to enable them to get justice from or to get even with the members of the other. If the American missionary would not help them, as the French missionary helped his people, then his was the loss of "face" and following.

In these circumstances some missionaries have doubtless appealed to the native officials and to their own consuls on behalf of their people, in cases other than persecution; the treaties accord protection to the native Christians when persecuted on account of their religious faith, although this is a doubtful advantage.

The net result of all this has been only trouble for all concerned. The missionaries have been caused endless annoyance and at times serious difficulties. There is general agreement among the Anglo-Saxons that they will not go to the yamens in behalf of their Chinese members under any conditions. Some have expressed to me the wish that the boards would make a peremptory ruling that missionaries must not meddle with law cases, so that they could make this answer when appealed to. Certainly it is the conclusion of all impartial observers that it is gravely unwise for missionaries to attempt to influence the course of Chinese civil and criminal administration, even when these are unjust.

Nevertheless, I have learned from consuls and from missionaries of some cases wherein American missionaries have appealed to the mandarins or to the consuls on behalf of natives.

The pre-eminent importance of "face" in China makes this sort of thing harder for a Chinese official to swallow than it would be for an Anglo-Saxon, although the endurance of it on the part of the latter is an impossible hypothesis. Magistrates are thereby shorn of prestige and power by the meddlesome foreigners. The procedures which pass for judicial processes in China are knocked sky high. Thus, although most officials with whom I have talked clearly distinguish between French and American missionaries, there is undoubtedly a widespread hostility against all missionaries on the part of the official class. They associate, and not without reason, the loss of much of their territory with the missionary's presence and activity in civil affairs. Embodied in every missionary, to the Chinese mind, is the ever present possibility of complications with foreign powers. Small wonder the throne has recently been memorialized by the progressives for a retrocession of extra-territorial rights.