



In the literal sense . . .

A HOLY TERROR^{SA}

The Cardinal of Africa. By José de Arteche. Translated by Mairin Mitchell. (Sands; 18/-.)

By MARY PURCELL

HAD he lived a century later, Cardinal Lavigerie, Archbishop of Algiers and Carthage, would find the sensational newspapers dubbing him a "problem prelate". He was impetuous yet intransigent; lovable if quite unpredictable; humble but self-assertive.

An intellectual who was an able organiser; an extrovert who lived an intense and hidden spiritual life; an autocrat with equals and superiors; he was a father to all others. In him largeness of heart and a ready compassion were combined with an explosive temper and caustic tongue. Like other men of action he did not suffer bureaucrats gladly. Though blessed with a saving sense of humour he was, in the most literal sense of the term, a "holy terror".

Born in Bayonne in 1823, Charles Lavigerie made a name for himself as a Sorbonne professor soon after his ordination. Later his administrative ability became evident when he organised relief measures for the Maronite Christians who survived the Druze massacres in Syria and the Lebanon.

Lure of the hinterland

He was 44 when appointed to the See of St. Augustine. For the next quarter of a century he devoted himself to the people of Algeria, but his zeal was not limited to diocesan boundaries. Beyond Algeria he saw the hinterland, that vast continent with 200 million souls to be won for God. In his first year in Algiers he founded the White Fathers Society, giving them a habit resembling Arab dress and a rule that obliged them to eat Arab food and to speak Arabic.

His first missionaries, on their way to Tambuctoo, were murdered by Tuaregs. It was typical of their Founder, after he had announced the news in Algiers Cathedral, to intone the *Te Deum*, not the *De Profundis*. Anti-clerical Paris papers at once attacked him, accusing him of having sent Frenchmen to certain death. French-Algerian civil authorities rebuked him and tried to hamper his missionary work, but they did not know their man.

Like Charles de Gaulle, Charles de Lavigerie had a flair for treating opponents with dignity, inflexibility, and a touch of hauteur. Caravans of White Fathers—and later, White Sisters—were soon trekking south towards Uganda, Tanganyika and the very heart of Africa.

Africa for the Africans

The Brussels Conference of 1876, ostensibly convened for philanthropic and scientific projects in Africa, was really a meeting of European statesmen intent on the commercial exploitation of a continent then little known. Throughout the proceedings a blind eye was turned on the iniquitous slave trade, so profitable to certain Arab, Zanzibar, and debased white traders.

Lavigerie viewed with grave misgivings the Brussels plan to force European customs, arts, trade and education systems on African peoples. He foresaw the day when the African would be

ready to borrow from the European what he found useful and valuable for his way of life in his own country. While statesmen wrangled and plotted to enrich their countries at Africa's expense this single-minded man thought only of Africans and their future. He raised the matter with the Holy See, pointing out the errors of those who assumed that what was good for Europeans must also be good for Africans.

He had first-hand knowledge of the evils of slavery and took a leading part in the anti-slavery campaign. Crossing to Europe in 1858 he spoke in dozens of cities, from Rome to London and from Lisbon to Brussels. A giant in stature, he was a magnificent and convincing speaker. In an appeal made in Rome he paraphrased Terence's *Homo sum*:

"I am a man, and the injustice of other men rouses my heart to rebellion. I am a man, and cruelty to other men fills me with horror. I am a man, and what I should like to have done to me and mine, to restore liberty, honour and sacred family ties, I wish to do for the unfortunate African slaves to restore to them family, honour and freedom."

A heavy cross

He was not destined to see the final abolition of slavery,

and a heavy cross awaited him in his final years. Pope Leo XIII wished to conciliate the then well established Republican regime in France; a growing pacific tendency in government circles in that country convinced him that the time was ripe to make a diplomatic gesture of goodwill. As Cardinal Lavigerie was so popular, so widely known, the Pope decided that he was the prelate most likely to be acceptable to the newly elected French government.

Lavigerie who, all his life, had held himself absolutely at the service of the reigning Pontiff, agreed to make the gesture. The occasion was the famous "Toast of Algiers," when the officers, mainly Royalist, heard with horror the Cardinal propose a toast to the "legitimate government."

In one day Lavigerie lost popularity, mission benefactors, friends, reputation. He was insulted everywhere he went, attacked from right and left. Pope Leo decided to say nothing until the storm blew over. The Cardinal suffered alone. Three years later he died.

But what did he say?

In José de Arteche's stirring biography of this remarkable man the absence of an index and source-list are minor flaws. More serious is the omission of reference to the 33 Uganda Martyrs canonised last year. To the White Father who informed him of their terrible martyrdom and their unyielding fortitude the Cardinal wrote: "I glorify God for having put on the lips of these poor, illiterate Ugandan boys words no less sublime than those of the martyrs of Roman Carthage."

More quotation throughout the book would have been welcome, particularly when there was a wealth of letters and public records to be drawn upon.

Mairin Mitchell deserves congratulations on her admirable translation of de Arteche's work. This Basque writer's Spanish does not readily lend itself to translation, but Miss Mitchell seems to have made her own the principles for translators so aptly formulated by Belloc, and to have set herself Knox's famous headline: "A translation is a good one in proportion as you can forget, while reading it, that it is a translation at all."