RELIGIONS OF CHINA.

The tie which unites the visible with the invisible world, which reaches over the distance between man and God, is religion. It is the most precious gift of God to men: by it, a world of wickedness is preserved from that desolation, which would be the immediate consequence of the absence of all true religion from the earth. But the name of religion has been often given to systems of mere falsehood and delusion; in which the adoration of the Supreme Being has been neglected for the service of his creatures; and by which man, instead of being "brought nigh," has been more estranged from God.

In our view of the religions prevalent in China, we lament that this last remark is too applicable to them. It is important, in the first place, to ascertain how much of the patriarchal religion has been retained. Few records of the belief of the ancient Chinese remain. We can trace, however, in them, a primeval adoration of one Supreme Being, under the name of Shang-te. We believe that Tein, or Hwang-teen, was adored as the great God and benefactor of mankind. The sacrifices made to Shang-te seem to have been in imitation of those which Noah and his progeny offered; yet to determine precisely how far the true knowledge of God influenced the Chinese to worship him, as the only fountain of all light and grace, is at this distance of time impossible. Though there are some passages in the Shoo-king and She-king, which
allude to the omniscience and omnipotence of the Supreme Being, there are others more numerous, which induce us to believe, that idolatry gained ascendency at a very early period. We fully believe, that the sacrifices which the Chinese sovereigns, in ancient times, offered to Shang-te, were in imitation of that patriarchal institution, by which every father of a family was its priest also; but, at the same time, we regret that many sacrifices are mentioned, which were by no means instituted to honour the Supreme Being. Yet we believe that the records which have come down to us were greatly and purposely mutilated by the transcribers, and even modelled according to the prevailing customs of later ages. Even the commentators on the "Five Classics," have often explained away divine truths in them, and substituted their own errors as the genuine sense of the passages. Antiquity has always been the model to which the Chinese classic writers refer. We are therefore led to think, that some sufficient cause must have induced them to retrace their steps to former ages, and to admire there those things of which they considered their own age destitute. The rude simplicity of their ancestors seemed principally to attract admiration; they contrasted it with the hypocrisy of their own times, where they found nothing to praise; but the golden age of ancient days was all perfection. Though they undoubtedly overrate antiquity, yet this is an honourable testimony in favour of the superior morals which resulted from even the partial maintenance of the true religion; a religion founded on the revelations which God made to the progenitors of mankind, and which was spread as far as the migration of their posterity extended. We can, however, by no means plead exemption from barbarism for Chinese antiquity. Before the times of Yaou and Shun, (2200 years before Christ,) they lived in holes and caves, wore garments of skins, and devoured the raw flesh and the blood of animals. Their social order was not established, a prey to endless plunder; communication was facilitated by the ease with which the Chinese authors were wont to model this picture of wretchedness, and order to set off the virtue of Shun.

From the time of the rule of Yaou begins. He reduced his system, added his own laws, religious as well as political laws, that goodness should abound in quaint places, the observances, and morals and social happiness. These were exhibited in all its force, the filial piety, as the Chinese advocate. We admire the subordinates, the system recommends. A system of the prevailing doctrines of his countrymen, in every foundation, and no art of the greatest philosophers has been forgotten, or as the Chinese scholars; but the Chinese are made up by many millions of them, and the best theories the system therefore possesses.

In looking through the records the principal and justly are studied silence on being towards him, and others. In vain we look for the soul; in vain for a system of ethics.
social order was not yet established, their dead were left unburied, a prey to wild beasts, and no written character facilitated communication. Such is the description which the Chinese authors themselves give. We doubt not that this picture of wretchedness is too highly coloured, in order to set off the merits of the emperors Yaou and Shun.

From the time of Kang-foo-tsze, (Confucius,) a new era begins. He reduced the traditions of antiquity into a system, added his own opinions, and became the moral as well as political lawgiver of his country. His writings abound in quaint sayings, striking aphorisms, practical observations, and most useful lessons to promote order and social happiness. The theory of good government is here exhibited in all its varieties. He lays particular stress upon filial piety, as the source of all political prosperity. We admire the subordination which he every where inculcates. We prize the practical tendency of much that he recommends. A system like his could never have become the prevailing doctrine of so many ages, to so many millions of his countrymen, if there had been no excellency in its foundation, and no adaptation to usefulness. The opinions of the greatest philosophers of the western world have been forgotten, or are kept in remembrance only by a few scholars; but the Confucian system is studied to this day, by many millions of people, as the only rule of conduct, and the best theory of good government. But is this system therefore perfect?

In looking through the pages of Lun-yu, a work which records the principal sayings of Confucius, we observe a studied silence on the existence of God, on our duty towards him, and on the worship of this adorable Being. In vain we look for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul; in vain for a description of the future state; in vain for a system of ethics which inculcate humility as a virtue
most acceptable in the sight of God. Even the Chung-yung, which hints at one great truth, man's insufficiency to become truly virtuous, blends the natural heaven with the Creator of heaven, and often applies to the former what belongs exclusively to the latter. The Confucian maxim is: revere the gods of the land; pay them your respects by offering stated sacrifices; treat them all with distant politeness; discharge your duty to mankind in general, and your relations in particular. The mind of Confucius was so much engrossed with the things of this world, and with the necessity of establishing human happiness by human laws, that he entirely lost sight of the most important duty of man—gratitude towards his Creator and Preserver. His peculiar care was bestowed upon form, and the material part of man: he never pretended to enter the spiritual world, or to speak of their future destiny—

"Where, amid the wide ethereal,
All the invisible world shall crowd;
And the naked soul surround
With realities unknown."

As soon as he has described the ceremonies of the funeral, respecting the grave which includes those corruptible remains, and the idolatrous sacrifices at the tombs, he then ceases to speak. Beyond the threshold of mortality all is darkness: not even the idea of eternity enters his mind.* We do not call him an atheist, though many of his present followers are such; for his allusions to a superior power are often very plain; but his ideas are very confused, and he constantly confounds materialism with incorporeity. The principle of the reciprocate action of Yin and Yang, light and darkness, heaven and earth, the male and female principle, occurs constantly. He thus explains the progress of nature in its general primary cause, by confounding a perfect pantheism in heaven (T’ien,) and the things are made and the ruling Providence, with Confucius formed, or which represents the world in the affairs of the world. All the elements are the product of the immediate name, of all the elements are the product of the world.

We do not triumph over human understanding in the true religion; we wish to exalt the honour to God for some of the most celebrated follow the Chinese. What comes from God, that is evil, is the product of the numerous followers in God; yet "they neither ascribed to him thankful, but because foolishly, the foolish heart was darkness, and they became fools." The notions respecting the universe, so far as to deny Tae-keih, an existence, is an of this universe, is loaded with bringing forth, uniting works in conjunction self-existent. But they minds actually put to their minds. They are callous to happiness, and are ready..."
explains the procreation of all things by the process of nature in its generating system, and reasons away the primary cause, by confounding it with the effect. We have a perfect pantheism in the Chinese system of constituting heaven (Teen,) and earth (Te,) the gods, by which all things are made and maintained. To account for an over-ruling Providence, which is visible even to a heathen mind, Confucius formed, or improved the system of the Yih-king, which represents the manifold changes in nature, as well as in the affairs of the world, as produced by the mutual action of all the elements and principles of the visible world, in strict imitation of the principles of Yin and Yang.

We do not triumph in the gross aberration of unaided human understanding, in order to enhance the value of the true religion; we wish, on the contrary, to ascribe all due honour to God for sending a man like Confucius, and his most celebrated follower, Meneius, to so large a nation as the Chinese. Whatever is praiseworthy in his system, comes from God, the source of all wisdom; and all which is evil, is the product of man's corrupt heart.

The numerous followers of Confucius could have known God; yet "they neither glorified him as God, nor were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves wise, they became fools." Instead of correcting erroneous notions respecting the Deity, they have even wandered so far as to deny his existence. It is true, that Tae-keih, an existence before the creation of the universe, is loaded with creative epithets in one respect, as bringing forth, uniting, and preserving all the parts. It works in conjunction with Le, reason, which is deified as self-existent. But while they maintain these theories, their minds actually plunge into atheism, or gross idolatry. They are callous to all which concerns man's supreme happiness, and are real Epicureans in the world. Bent on
the enjoyment of this life, their only sphere of happiness, they disregard every thing which does not immediately contribute towards their earthly welfare. But when death arrives, which cuts off their prospects, they often throw themselves into the arms of a Budha or Taou priest, whom they had heretofore treated with the utmost contempt.

There is, strictly speaking, no state religion. The Confucianists are latitudinarians; yet there are certain rites prescribed which must be observed by all who are in the service of the government. The emperor himself very solemnly worships heaven and earth (Teen-te); the provincial governors, the gods of the land (Shay and Tseih), with all the spirits presiding over the elements; the queen of heaven (Teen-how), who with Lung-wang, rules also over the sea; the god of war (Kwan-te); and above all, Confucius, and the gods of literature. The worship of their ancestors is observed by the literati with far greater strictness than by the common people. Thus we meet atheism in league with polytheism, and both in opposition to true religion.

It would be unjust to assert that all the mandarins and Confucians are equally ignorant or depraved. There are certainly many who discern some glimmerings of light; but the major part still go on in this course of mental perversion. Their fears and hopes terminate with this life, and the spring of all their actions is self-interest.

And yet China, as a nation, claims the nearest affinity to heaven; it is heaven upon earth—"the Celestial Empire." They have endeavoured to model their government after nature, and the laws of the visible heavens. Even their military standards and royal palaces are supposed to have resemblance to celestial objects. With the son and viceroy of heaven at their head, the Chinese claimed, as a religious right, interference with the governments and states which disobeyed the decrees of heaven. They punished them, they extirpated them, they attempted to subvert heaven and earth; and in time we have instances of men worshipping heaven with the sordid motives of commerce.

It is a most extraordinary fact, that God in the world" should be worshipped on earth presumes to arrogate to himself these terrestrial regions, these Chinese religious-political institutions.

Laou-tsze, the founder of the Lao-tzu sect, lived in the time of Confucius, and his system is the same as that of Lao-tze himself. But it is not for the sake of the doctrine of Confucius and his disciples to prove that their system is inferior, that we are more numerous, and that they have found their way even to China.

And yet, as we see, the supreme emperor and his ministers have followed the inscrutable, or three precious yellow书籍, to the mystery of the Celestial Empire. They have penetrated into this wisdom, and have found its way even to China.

We do not pretend to be the instruments of reason, or the essence of life, or the mystery of the Platonic school.

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them, they extirpated them, as a warning against all future attempts to subvert heaven's laws. Even at the present time we have instances where they confound the laws of heaven with the sordid intrigues of their own government. It is a most extraordinary fact, that a nation "without God in the world" should claim what no other nation on earth presumes to arrogate—to stand in heaven's stead in these terrestrial regions; yet this is one article of the Chinese religious-political creed.

Laou-tsze, the founder of the Taou sect, was a contemporary of Confucius. His metaphysics are far more subtle than those of Confucius, their tendency is less practical, and hence they have fewer votaries, and are understood only by the higher order of Taou priests. Though they are much less perspicuous than the Confucians, yet they speak of a future state; they glance at the existence of a Supreme Being, and urge the human mind to the practice of virtue by notions drawn from a future state of existence. Yet they do not exclude, but inculcate idolatry. The San-shing, or three precious ones in heaven, has evidently reference to the mystery of the Trinity, of which tradition has found its way even to China. The Yuh-hwang, or Shang-te, the supreme emperor and most honourable in heaven; Pih-te, the northern emperor; Hwa-kwang, the god of fire, and a whole train of lares, penates, and other inferior gods, demonstrate sufficiently, that without the aid of divine revelation, we never know the only true God. Their Taou, reason, or the essence of all reason, and the fountain whence all reason flows, coincides in many respects with the *logos* of the Platonic school.

We do not pretend to exhibit here all the absurdities which are so amply detailed in the works of this sect. We consider the Taou sect as the mystics of the heathen world in China. The birth of their founder is related as a miraculous event. He lived a retired life, and clothed his
doctrines in subtle, and often unintelligible language. We find there a system of demons and of demonical agency; a description, or rather some hints of the state of a human being separated from the body; control of the passions as the most worthy object of our care, and the direct way to felicity. Alchemy employs the researches of their most celebrated priests; animal magnetism, which has made so much noise in Europe, is known to those who are farthest advanced in their doctrines, and is often shamefully abused. They pretend to possess the liquid which confers immortality; they impose upon the common people, and always act with a very mysterious air. Lofty in pretensions, and nice in their speculations, they hunt after phantoms, and lose themselves in the abyss of uncertainty.

Buddhism, a foreign religion introduced about seventy years after Christ, is far better adapted to the common people, and has therefore the most numerous followers. The system of idolatry which this doctrine enjoins is very gross, but the idols are not obscene. Consistent Buddhists are atheists. While they tolerate idolatry in every shape, and adopt every known idol, they reduce the whole universe to a self-existent machinery, which moves without the intervention of any agent. Every particle of this great universe is an emanation from the vast vacuum, into which all visible things will gradually be absorbed. The souls of men and of beasts continually transmigrate till they arrive at the highest pitch of tranquillity, the summit of happiness—to be swallowed up in nonentity. Budha, with his numerous disciples, have trodden this path before, and have safely reached the vacuum, and his true disciples now ought to imitate them. Their gods are as numerous as human invention can make them. Above the thrones are the San-paou-fuh, or the three precious Budhas; the goddess Kwan-yin, who nourishes all things; the holy mother, or queen of heaven; and nameless other deities, which deform

the monstrous system. They are very minute, and so the object passion to reason, and they mark as the shortest, silence, utter apathy of thought and action. A people by becoming as unfeeling of happiness. Their pa
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But their Tartarus (hell). The condemned are sealed up in caldrons, frozen, and arrive at a new metempsychosis; and friars, are very much ignorant; their system is on tained for want of a better. When this world is rec
the guilty soul. Its life

The present dynasty is the superiority of the Lamas. And this creed, which is either from it, it forms a part influence of the Thibetan. It may prove a check to the (plains) of Central Asia.

The Chinese nation can exceed the splendid celebrated. Their gene

the monstrous system. The moral precepts of their religion are very minute, and some of them are excellent. To subject passion to reason, and to curb the lusts, appear to be the object at which they aim. Their forbearance to take life in any case is carried to extremes. The way which they mark as the shortest that leads to happiness is, perfect silence, utter apathy of feeling, and entire cessation from thought and action. As soon as a man ceases to be man by becoming as unfeeling as a stone, he enters the portals of happiness. Their paradise in a future world is a splendid garden, with trees of gold, and birds of the same among the branches, singing in perpetual melodious strains. Sweet odours impregnate the air of this celestial region; nectar flows in the rivers; and eternal day excludes the night. But their Tartarus (hell) is the haunt of unspeakable misery. The condemned are strangled, sawn asunder, boiled in caldrons, frozen, and in other ways tormented, till they arrive at a new metempsychosis. Their monasteries, nuns, and friars, are very numerous; their priests generally very ignorant; their system despised by every one, but maintained for want of a better. Buddhism is the refuge of all when this world is receding, and the horrors of death oppress the guilty soul. Its literature is in verse.

The present dynasty seems to have supported the authority of the Lamas. As the Monguls are much attached to this creed, which is either Buddhism, or varies very slightly from it, it forms a part of the Chinese policy to support the influence of the Thibetian Grand Lama, whose authority may prove a check to the wild inhabitants of the steppes (plains) of Central Asia.

The Chinese national festivals are numerous, and nothing can exceed the splendour and clamour with which they are celebrated. Their gods are then visited, their temples decorated, their future destiny consulted. The feast of the tombs, and the birth-days of gods and heroes, constitute
numerous occasions of mirth and festivity, which a nation so sensual as the Chinese demand for the gratification of their appetites. These pastimes begin with offerings of burning incense, and prostrations to the gods, and end in revelry, drunkenness, and gambling. Their gods are treated with the odour of the viands placed before them, while they themselves consume the more substantial part.

To venerate the dead, and to keep up an affectionate remembrance of the worthy who have gone before us, is the duty of every mortal; but to offer sacrifices to the manes of their ancestors, and to prostrate before the tablets created to their memory, is a gross idolatry. This is the universal practice in China; the law enjoins such idolatry; Confucius taught his disciples to serve the dead as they would serve the living; and he who omits this sacred duty, is stigmatized as the veriest wretch in existence.

So general degradation in religion, makes it almost impossible that females should have their proper rank in society. They are the slaves and concubines of their masters—live and die in ignorance—and every effort to raise themselves above the rank assigned them, is regarded as impious arrogance. We should not mention this under the head of religion, did not Confucius designate to females an inferior station, and use every argument to render them mere cyphers in society. Taoism and Buddhism join in this endeavour, so destructive to social and human happiness. As long as the mothers are not the instructors of their children, and wives are not the companions of their husbands, the regeneration of this great empire will proceed very slowly.

Astrology, divination, geomancy, and necromancy, prevail everywhere in China. Though some of these practices are forbidden by the government, yet the prohibitions are never carried into effect. The Chinese wear amulets, have tutelar deities, enchanted grounds, &c., all the offspring of blind superstition. We find the same human nature in a nation ever growing, and nowise destitute of error; at the same time, cannot avoid reflecting towards all religious subjects, according as custom bids them be so. The whole which occupy their thoughts, and participate in any religious observance, Confucius have greatly exalted; in character in this respect, is everything is form, and the Earthly pursuits fill the world with money, to obtain honour, wealth, and his offspring, are the objects of his ambition. When he has gained his end, he calmly enjoys his felicity, an destroyer of all bliss, and free to avert the indignation of fortune. There are the most indifferent people.

In the writings of the philosophers in China, have endeavoured to enlighten the human mind, and to avert the ingenuity of the most indifferent people.

We refer to the Chinese mind, void of all but that from their own classics. The mind of Paul, "Where is the wise of the disputers of this world?
of blind superstition. We lament the deep degradation of human nature in a nation endowed with sound understanding, and nowise destitute of reflecting minds. We, at the same time, cannot avoid noticing their general apathy towards all religious subjects. They are religious, because custom bids them be so. Forms and ceremonies are the whole which occupy their minds, their hearts scarcely ever participate in any religious worship. That the doctrines of Confucius have greatly contributed to form the national character in this respect, is doubtless the fact. With him every thing is form, and the outward ceremony is worship. Earthly pursuits fill the whole mind of a Chinese; to gain money, to obtain honour, to see his name propagated in his offspring, are the objects for which he constantly strives. When he has gained his end, he relaxes in energy, and calmly enjoys his felicity. He dreads death as the destroyer of all bliss, and frequently builds splendid temples to avert the indignation of the gods on account of his ill-gotten gain. There are few exceptions to this general assertion, that, in religious matters, the Chinese are among the most indifferent people on the earth.

In the writings of the Chinese sages, we may see a fair specimen of the degree of knowledge in natural religion, to which the human mind may arrive without the aid of revelation. Philosophers in Europe, and even missionaries in China, have endeavoured to make them speak the language of a heathen acquainted with Christianity. The ancient writers, their commentators, and the literati of the present day, would not even understand the sentiments which are ascribed to them. The most simple truth of Christianity, which even a deist acknowledges, is unintelligible to a Chinese mind, void of any other ideas except those drawn from their own classics. We may here exclaim with St. Paul, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the
wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

In the enumeration of the different religions which are known in China, we ought to mention the Jews and Mohammedans. The former are said to have entered China under the dynasty of Han, two hundred years before Christ. They have diminished in number, and at present possess only one synagogue, at Kae-fang-foo, the capital of the province Honan. The little which we know of them, rests upon the authority of Gozani, a missionary; we have never met with any, nor with any allusions to them in the Chinese books, from which we might infer their existence.

The Mohammedans are more numerous; in the western provinces bordering on Mohammedan countries, there are great numbers. They are distinguished from the Chinese heathen only by their abstinence from certain meats, and by disclaiming idolatry. In this latter article, however, they are not so rigid but that they conform occasionally to the common ceremonies of their countrymen.

CHRISTIANITY, that heavenly gift, was bestowed on many nations, though long as the Holy Spirit extends. Congregations of nations known at that time, and have no account that the first went from Armenia to the Caucous.” From hence they spread among the Tartars of the north, a barrier to the Chinese empire; and thus have found its way to China and seems to be probable, that the traveller, Marco Polo, who met with the Christian heretics whom he met in parts of Asia which he visited, in the Syrian churches of Honan, had entered China. This they have a Syriac inscription, for that province. Though we much of this inscription,