

was adopted by Confucius, and is the most powerful religious custom affecting China. It is the most universal and ancient form of idolatry found in the country. It hangs a curtain of gloomy superstition over the land. Ancestral halls are endowed and repaired, and the ceremonies perpetuated thereby.

Numerous tablets, twelve to fifteen inches high, are erected for departed relatives, before which incense is burned morning and evening. For a deceased father the ceremonial must be kept up for forty-nine days. A bridegroom's ancestors must be worshipped by his bride as well as himself. When a scholar obtains his degree, when an officer is advanced in rank, and on anniversaries of births and deaths, this worship must be performed. At the Festival of the Tombs in the spring time, the people universally have a family gathering to worship the dead. In ancestral halls, in private rooms, in the house, before a few tablets or hundreds, the worship goes on. A family is mentioned in Canton having eleven hundred tablets in each of two rooms, and the third containing an image of the ancestor, a disciple of Confucius who lived B. C. 300. The tablets are arranged from above downwards, the oldest being on the top. The venerable amongst the living may have tablets also, but covered with red paper.

The object of this worship is two-fold, viz.: to secure the repose of the dead; to provide them with comfort, clothing, furniture, made of paper and transported to them by burning; and also to secure the worshipper from damage in person, business or property, from the restless ghosts of these departed relations. One half of the female population of China devote their time, not occupied in domestic duties, to making articles connected with ancestral worship.

Large benevolence and kindness to both men and animals have been claimed for the Chinese as the result of their religions. It is probable that the Buddhist doctrine of metempsychosis does superinduce some carefulness in the matter of destroying life, but the cruel and inhuman character of Chinese punishment at law, show the absolute failure of all these religions combined to master the barbarous element of heathenism.

*Early Missions.*—It is probable that Christianity was introduced at a very early date into China. In the sixth century the Nestorian Christians had missions there. These became flourishing a century later. The Roman Catholics have had missions in China for nearly six hundred years, though with a fluctuating fortune. After seventy-six years they were almost wholly broken up. Recently they have increased their force of workers; in 1870 they claimed 404,530 adherents.