

in his closet, and reverently lift his eyes to some aerial abode of the Spirit. No; he makes a little tablet of wood and invites the Spirits of his ancestors to rest there while he prays to them. Gifts are made, which are more of the nature of oblations than sacrifices; and prayers are offered. The ancestors are present by a fiction of the imagination and being thus present, exercise a powerful influence over the worshippers. The consciences of many people are not automatic, but need to be aided in their operations. Men will practise many things, when unseen, without even a twinge of conscience; but let this be brought beneath the eyes of others, let a man be proven guilty in a court, and his face will burn with shame, his conscience will reprove him bitterly. The Chinese enters the closet, made sacred by the presence of his ancestors, and his conscience calls up to his mind all his little sins, little waverings, little wanderings. They appear to him ten times worse than ever before. He worships humbly with confession on his lips; and goes forth resolved, if possible, so to live as to merit the approval of his ancestors. This worship of ancestors is given by all the people. Tablets are to be found in every household. It is carried on with great pomp and ceremony by the emperors, princes and nobility; with simplicity by the poorer classes.

The above is a brief description of the ancient religion of China. But what is Confucianism? Did the great sage not introduce a new religion? No; he originated no religion. He merely revived the ancient religion, and forced its duties home upon the heart of the people. Slowly but surely, under the ancient religion, the Empire had been sinking. The feudal system had come into existence. For two hundred years there had practically been no King in

China, and every Prince did what was right in his own eyes. Out of this chaos was born Confucius. The heart of this great man was touched by the wrangling, and strife, and warfare in the Empire. The possibilities of what might be filled his mind, and his soul was fired with a great ambition. He resolved to renovate the state of affairs; to bring to light the proper relationships of Society. He had studied the ancient classics and his heart laid hold of their truth. He believed that they contained within them the germ of all right action. They had become obscured through time, but their study should be revived, their truth should be transmitted to the present generation. To this task he set himself, and devoted his life. When he died, however, he had apparently accomplished little; but after his death, with Pentecostal flame, his greatness was noised abroad; and he was soon recognised as a superior man, by the people throughout the entire Empire.

Confucius exercised a wonderful influence over China, turned the whole current of Chinese history, and marked the beginning of a new period.

Let us consider some of the things which Confucius emphasized in his teachings. He had nothing whatever to say upon religion. When questioned by his disciples about a hereafter he would put them off by saying, "We understand not life; how then can we understand death." He confined his attention to the relationships of society. He saw, amid the strife around him, that they were all wrong. He thought, naturally enough, that if these relationships were brought to light, all would be remedied; peace would be restored. It was human for him to do so; and like a human being he took an extreme.

His whole system is based upon one fundamental principle, which is embodied in one of his profound,