

## THE RELIGION OF CHINA.

There is no written standard of religious belief in China to fix the popular creed. The Taoist and Buddhist priests—especially the latter—understand but little even of their own religious books, and others of course are ignorant of their contents. The vulgar superstitions float at random upon the popular mind, and are handed down by tradition from generation to generation. The writings of the philosophers treat to some extent of the principles of morality, but their religion, if it may be called such, embraces only the present life. As to the great problems of human existence and human destiny—the end for which we were brought into being, and the future state which awaits us—they are silent. The foundation of their system is the original purity, and the perfectibility, of human nature. The highest virtue is attainable by the unassisted efforts of the moral faculties, and the attainment is urged only because it secures present happiness. If there be any regard to the favour of heaven, and the Supreme Ruler, it has reference to that favour chiefly, if not entirely, as experienced in this world. The foundation of this morality is humanity, not deity. Humanity, therefore, is exalted into deity. This principle extends through all grades of society. That most men sometimes do wrong cannot be denied, but the depravity of our nature is an idea so opposed to all the notions of the Chinese, that it cannot be even understood. Few will admit their own hearts to be wicked. The aged will commonly acknowledge that in youth they have committed indiscretions, but an appeal to a white beard is considered a sufficient guarantee that the heart is pure from sin. The necessity of an atonement, therefore, is not dreamed of, and the doctrine will of course be received with contempt.

The worship of ancestors, which indeed is made almost the whole of religion, is but a deification of human nature. The same principle may perhaps account in part for the very general prevalence of hero worship, and the great number of deified men. Of the numerous temples which meet the eye in every direction, a large proportion consists of those which have been erected by families and individuals in honour of their own immediate ancestors, or by the people of the district, in honour of men who for eminent services to the country have been elevated to the rank of gods. These temples are but little frequented, and are commonly closed except on the special occasions on which the god receives his appointed honours. An instance of such a deification is of recent occurrence. The streets of Shanghai are now adorned by a temple, dedicated to the worship of a distinguished commander, who fell near that city, in an engagement with the English troops, during the late war. It is a little singular, that while countless names of lesser note are honoured with the title of deity, Confucius is never spoken of as such, though in every district a temple is erected to his memory.

The gods of the Chinese pantheon for the most part bear a national character. But a small part can be considered as the exclusive property of either of the religious sects. Every district has its gods of the land and grain, of the hills and valleys, of the springs and fountains of water; and every city, its tutelary deity, known as "the god of the city wall and ditch." The prominent objects in nature, are regarded as proper objects of worship. It is no uncommon sight to see an aged man placing a stick of burning incense at the door of his dwelling, and then bow reverently toward the four points of the compass, in worship of the material heavens and the earth. A generally prevalent notion is, that if a man is faithful in the worship of the Chinese trinity, of heaven, earth, and ancestors, it is not of much importance whether he worship any other god or not. In ordinary conversation, the sun and moon are commonly spoken of as Ta Yang Poussa, and Ta Ying Poussa—or the great male and female deities. At the period of the winter solstice, there is a general thanksgiving in each family to the god of fire, for the preservation from the ravages of the terrible element during the year. An expression of thanks, printed on a slip of paper is pasted over the door of each house for several days.

It is a prevalent notion that man is possessed of three souls, of which, at death, one enters the place of departed spirits, another enters the tomb with the body, and the third remains with the tablet of the deceased which is worshipped. Accordingly, when a death takes place at a distance from the family, priests are employed to call back the wandering spirit to the family abode, and the tablet of the dead. Yet there is a general

belief in some kind of future rewards and punishments, and when a death occurs, priests are almost always called in to offer prayers for the soul of the departed. If the certainty concerning those things which lie beyond the grave, which is enjoyed by those who live under the light of revelation, fails in so many instances to arouse the heart from its natural apathy and indifference, we cannot look for any thing better among those whose views are shrouded in obscurity and uncertainty. Occasionally, indeed, some are found among the more aged, who, as they become sensible of their declining strength, manifest some solicitude to secure happiness after death; but in general the approach of death is regarded with utter indifference. It is not surprising, therefore, that the crime of suicide should prevail, as it does, to a fearful extent. There is nothing to restrain from its commission but the natural love of life. When trials and hardships render life a burden; or when anger, or despair, takes possession of the mind; or even when a family brawl, or harassing creditors, or impending disgrace, cast a cloud over the pathway of life, death is readily embraced as a protecting friend. The instrument of self-destruction, in almost all cases, is the poisonous drug which is gnawing upon the vitals of China herself. Opium secures an easy and a bloodless death, and those who would not have courage to resort to more violent means, gladly avail themselves of its aid to rid themselves of the sorrows of life.

From this brief and very imperfect sketch it will be seen that there is very little religious feeling among the people that deserves the name. The Christian cannot but rejoice that the idolatry of so large a portion of the human family, is, to so great a degree, free from the most abominable features which have characterized it in almost every other Pagan land. Yet the nation is as deeply sunk in error as—effectually shut out from the light of life—as certainly sinking down to eternal death, as though they were barbarians of the most savage mould. Feeble indeed are the instruments, to whom it has been committed in trust, to bring them that gospel which has brought life and immortality to light, and long they may labour, to all appearance, in vain. But they shall not spend their strength for nought. The God who has sent us forth, is the same God who said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. When that command goes forth which shall illuminate the Chinese mind by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, then the Lord's elect shall be gathered in—a nation shall be born in a day, and China will bow the knee to Jesus. The word of the Lord must accomplish that whereunto he has sent it. It cannot return unto him void.—*Circular Letter of American Missionary.*

## WASTE OF LABOUR IN STRAGGLING SETTLEMENTS.

From a despatch addressed by Earl Grey to the Governor General, dated 1st April, 1847.

We know that, unaided and undirected in their efforts as they now are, numbers of the Emigrants who reach Canada with no resource but their labour to trust to, are enabled, in the course of a few years to realize property, and even to remit considerable sums of money to the friends and relations they have left behind. It is also notorious that in the present mode of conducting the settlement of the territory, there is a great waste of labour, and that far less results are obtained by means of the same amount of exertion, than might be looked for under a system which secured a greater degree of mutual co-operation and assistance amongst those who now trust, in a great measure, to their individual and isolated efforts. It is impossible to read any of the numerous and interesting accounts, published during the last few years, of the life of settlers in the backwoods of British America and of the United States, without being struck with the hardships and difficulties endured by them, and with the great waste of labour incurred entirely in consequence of the want of some means of giving increased efficiency to labour by combination and by the division of employments. We hear continually of bread being scarce where corn is cheap and abundant, because, from the distance of mills and the badness of the roads, it takes many days of toilsome labour for men and horses to carry a small quantity of corn to be ground, and to bring it back in the shape of flour. We hear of days wasted in, perhaps, the busiest part of the season in carrying to a distant forge, to be repaired, some necessary im-