

its bad features and retain only the good? Stripped of its idolatrous features, there would be nothing left to hold it together as a custom; for without this idea of a living, hearing, ever-present, ever-active spirit the whole structure would collapse, because there would be nothing left but sentiment. There would be no more in it to a native of China than there is in a game of baseball.

Reward—long life, prosperity, and happiness—is the passion that lies at the bottom of all his outward reverence and devotion—not native pride, not native glory. He makes a sort of insurance policy out of his belief, from which he expects both reward and protection, with a high-tariff plank against the introduction, into his little circle of existence, of sickness, and trouble, and adversity. Remove this feature and you remove the bottom out of the whole concern. The Rev. Y. K. Yen, a noted Chinese preacher, says, "All Chinese worship is for selfishness. If these people did not think the gods could affect men's bodies, the temples would be deserted, and ancestral worship decline." But it is a difficult matter to remove this one feature, much more than to abolish the whole system.

First. It is a system that is upheld and has been upheld by the government from time immemorial; has been endorsed by sacred edicts, enjoined by provincial manifestoes until it reads almost like a statute of the civil codes. It may be called the national religion, "for it is the only system of religion that the government takes the trouble to propagate" among its subjects. It is estimated that it costs the people one half the time of the female population to prepare articles for sacrifices and offerings that it demands, and the expenditure of one hundred and fifty millions in cold "cash" per annum to sustain it.

Second. Of all forms of idolatry, this is considered to be the most serious impediment in the conversion of the Chinese. It is the greatest obstacle that the missionary meets in his effort to set up the standards of the cross in China or to establish the Church of Christ in that benighted land. The Rev. John Ross tells of a Corean prince who was taken into China as a prisoner, and while in banishment came in contact with Christianity, and upon his return to his native land he gave this testimony: "If Protestant Christians could adopt ancestral worship, he saw no reason why Corea should not be a Christian country in three years." It is true of China as well. It sometimes seems as though this were the very last link that binds them to Satan's rule. It is a subtle influence he holds over their minds, containing so much good mixed up with so much more evil. "Go," he says, "if you must go, but take this custom with you if you go; then I will still reign." If they could only take this with them, how easy it would be to be Christian! But Christianity demands unconditional surrender; and so it comes that this is the last heathen custom that Chinese converts will yield. He would willingly let all else go, willingly cut loose from every other idol (so would the arch-enemy), if he could only cling to this one! To break away from this seems like breaking away