

## CONFUCIUS, THE AGNOSTIC.\*

BY CLELIA.

CONFUCIUS, we are told, was the son, in second nuptials, of a septuagenarian father. He was born 551 B.C., and in due course of nature was left in sole charge of his widowed mother. It would be interesting to ascertain how often it occurs that a son begotten in old age inherits an old head on his young shoulders. This seemed to be the case with Confucius, unless we are to attribute wholly to his good and clever mother, who devoted herself to bringing up her son, his early gravity and prudence, application to study, and proficiency in history and law. His good disposition, combined with his mother's family influence, early procured for him government employment, and he rose rapidly to important offices. It was then the feudal age of China, and the country was rent and distracted by the quarrels and wars of dukes, marquises and princelets; though in respect of literary culture, freedom of thought and general civilization, that remote part of Asia, now 2,400 years ago, had advanced immeasurably beyond our Europe of even so late as four hundred years ago. For the old religions of China were then hardly believed in; there was religious toleration and freedom from that sacerdotal tyranny which lay so heavy on Europe even to our times. But for the barbarism that remained, Confucius perceived that the only remedy was still the removal of ignorance. So he devoted all the time he could spare from his employment and his studies to teaching. At the age of 34 he became Prime Minister to the Duke of Lu; but the country becoming distracted by civil war, which prevented reform, he refused all offices and maintained himself as a student and teacher for fifteen years, and gained great influence throughout China. Then he became Premier of Lu, and now also head of the criminal department. In this position, "he not only fearlessly repressed the iniquities and oppressions of many great barons, but dismantled their fortified castles, and so let light into some very dark places and cruel tyrannies." But, "his judicious administration and enforcement of impartial justice made him very powerful enemies, and he was too popular to please an indifferent ruler and venal courtiers." After six years, finding himself left with only the name of power, he resigned. Years of wandering followed, from state to state, till in his 69th year he settled down to the completion of his literary tasks, to teaching all who would hear him, and to await death.

In the prime of life, he had a celebrated interview with the then aged

\*"Short Studies of the Science of Comparative Religions, embracing all the Religions of Asia." By Major-General J. G. R. Forlong, F.R.S.E., F.R.A.S., M.A.I., &c., author of "Rivers of Life." Bernard Quaritch, 15 Piccadilly.