

great was our Confucius!" The name Confucius is, of course, only the Latinized form of the Chinese word "Kung Futz," i.e., the philosopher, or writer Kung. Like Mohammed, Confucius was of noble birth, there being no prouder lineage in all China than that of which he boasted. But he was the son of his father's old age, and his father was poor. The son was obliged, therefore, to labor for his daily bread. Even as a youth, however, he was renowned for his thoughtfulness and learning; and so, at the age of 22, he became a teacher, teaching rich and poor alike. The ruler of his province, an important state, was driven out by revolutionists, and Confucius left his home. Studying for 15 years more, he was made magistrate of a town, and reformed its morals, even to the quality of the handiwork. Under his administration the greatest improvement was wrought in the condition of the people, the men becoming loyal and honest, the women models of domestic virtue. But such uprightness and justice made him enemies. He was driven into exile, and for many years wandered from place to place, hungry, reviled, and exposed even to personal danger. In vain he labored to induce some prince or magistrate to govern according to his precepts. But, although unsuccessful in this, he was, at 70 years of age, recalled from exile; and, during his five remaining years, he composed the greater part of his works. At last, wearied with life, he passed away, his wife and only son having died before him, and he himself having but little ground for believing that he had planted a seed from which one of the greatest and most widely accepted of all religions, or rather, ethical systems, should spring. At his death his followers numbered only 3,000, of whom only 70 or 80 were really enthusiastic in his work. With him, however, as with many another, his death was more powerful than his life. For at once there was a revulsion of popular feeling. Multitudes accepted his teachings and became his followers. To-day his tomb is the Mecca of millions, and stands in his own city, a city occupied still by his descendants, proud to trace, through 75 generations, their descent from the greatest of all their nation's seers. And not unworthy offspring have they proved, for again and again they have withstood tyranny and despotism, and have preserved untarnished the heroism of their noble sire. But not without opposition did Confucianism make its way. Rulers essayed to crush it; they destroyed his books and persecuted his followers; but at last they too accepted its founder as their typical leader, and assigned him the highest niche in their country's temple of fame.

What, then, was the character of Confucius and upon what had rested the success of his system? As to the first, we read that he was a thoroughly good man. Fearless, honorable, kind-hearted, it is doubtful whether any great teacher has ever led a life more nearly in accord with what he deemed the highest principles of morality than did this wise man of China. To the aged he was respectful, to the memory of the great ones of the past he paid unceasing reverence. "May it be told of me," he said, "that I have striven to become like unto them." With the young he was sympathetic and earnest. "We know not," he was wont to say, "but their future will be equal to our present." He was a ministering angel to the sick, the helpless, the poor. To the lower animals he was

kind and considerate. If he angled, he would not use a net; if he hunted, he would not shoot at a perching bird. He continually warned his people to be thoughtful and studious, to avoid narrowness of mind and prejudice. He always endeavored to see the good in every act and in every person, not the evil. One of his disciples said of him: "If our master beholds one good in a man, he forgets a hundred faults." Many precepts might be given from the sayings of Confucius, all breathing this same kindly spirit. For example: "Make happy those who are near, and those who are far will come"; "Love to speak of the good in others." Indeed, the Golden Rule was enunciated by him in unmistakable terms. He says: "Treat not others as you would not wish them to treat you." This, it is true, is only a negative, as distinguished from Christ's positive precept: "Whatsoever ye would men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." But Confucius understood this precept, even if he did not so express it, also in a positive sense. He represented the idea by means of one Chinese character consisting of two parts: the first part meaning *as* or *like*, the second *heart*. That is, "May thy heart be like the heart of thy neighbor." The fundamental principles, however, in all the teachings of Confucius were: (1) self-knowledge and self-control; (2) respect for established order. These are seen in all his sayings. For example: "What the superior man seeks is in himself, the inferior man in others"; "Man is greater than any system of thought"; "To see what is right and not to do it, is the mark of a cowardly mind"; "He who requires much from himself and little from others, will save himself from anger"; "Only he who has the most complete sincerity can transform and inspire others." Confucius had faith in the goodness of mankind, that if men see the right, they will do it; confidence that there is this basis, this substratum in humanity upon which, by self-knowledge and self-control, there can be built a civilization ever approaching more nearly to a perfect ideal.

But the governing principle in his system of ethics was respect for established order. "Everything," he said, "should have just its own place. The best country is that in which the emperor is emperor, the magistrate magistrate, the father father, and the son son." He was, he said, not a creator, but a transmitter of truth. He was wont, always to point to antiquity, to the sages and seers of old as examples for all time. He was very fond, therefore, of giving lectures on history, extolling the men who had lived in the past, and portraying in dark colors the present state of the world. He did not believe in progress as we understand the expression. He believed in individual progress, i.e., in the constant working up towards an ideal; but this ideal was ever in the past. He did not see that: "The old order changeth, giving place to new, And God fulfils Himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

His great work, the "Shi King, or Ancient Poems," is one of the most interesting books of old poetry in the world. He wrote or collected, also, many books of ritual. But, strange to say, an examination of these literary works does not increase our admiration for him. It is for his life and those precepts of his which have been handed down by his disciples, that he is chiefly to be honored.

The first great defect in the system of Confucianism is, then, its unprogressive spirit. This trait of the national religion it is that, more than anything else, has proved so destructive to progress in the Chinese people. They have looked ever backward, not forward; they have seen the golden age, not in the future, but in the far-off past. This is a characteristic of all Chinese history: its intense conservatism. And so we see that, although China has invented many things, she has never brought her inventions to perfection; although she has evolved many new ideas, she has never developed these ideas. Only in those arts which are essentially individual, e.g., the carving and pottery making, for which the Chinese are so famous, has progress been attained. Nationally, China is to-day where she was two thousand years ago.

The second great defect is the lack of spirituality: his was an ethical, a moral, not really a religious system. It is not correct to say that he was an atheist, any more than it is correct to say that there is no word in the Chinese language for God, as missionaries often have said. But it is correct to say that he was not influenced by the idea of God. He did not deny His existence: he simply ignored it. It is true that one finds such precepts as this: "If one cannot improve oneself or serve men, how can he improve others or serve God?" Yet he confined his teaching to the leading of a good life, trusting that if there be anything beyond or above us, the final outcome will be all right. He thus differed from the old masters of China, for they referred to God and our duty and responsibility to Him. Confucius thought that men ought not to occupy themselves about such things. A favourite maxim of his was: "If you do not know life, what can you know about death?" His system was, then, a system of secularism, very much like that of Frederick Harrison and the Positivists of our day. Good and evil, he held, will be recompensed by the natural issue of conduct within the sphere of time; if not in the person of the actor, at any rate in the person of his descendants. If there be any punishment or reward hereafter, he took no heed thereof. He considered that people should be taught to live a good life, and not to trouble themselves with anything more. As has just been said, he mentioned the name of God occasionally, but apparently only as we speak of nature, providence or fate. He had, as far as we can judge, no real belief in an intelligent Ruler of the universe; or, if he had, he seems to have thought that this Being takes very little interest in man and his affairs. As far as we know, he did not pray, and did not have, or apparently desire to have, any communion with the great Spirit above him. The consequence was that his life was, in one sense, a sordid life. He did not stand in awe-struck reverence before nature's masterpieces; he did not feel his soul lifted to unwonted heights as he gazed into the depths of the starry sky. God for him was virtually non-existent; his horizon was bounded by the limits of the earth, or rather of his people; and his whole philosophy was summed up in the words: "Do thy duty and in thine own sphere." We find, therefore, that Confucius had no chivalric feeling toward women. He honoured and loved his mother, it is true; but he had no condemnation of polygamy, and he evidently regarded woman, as she has ever been regarded in China, as an inferior being.