

banners flying, gongs beating, an indispensable melody (?) in Chinese parades, and horns tooting—the procession moves forward, a happy company. Upon reaching the cemetery “they cover the tombs with layers of fresh earth,” as we would plant our flowers, and afterward present their offerings of fowl, rice, fish, fruit, and wines that have been provided in extravagance. After the spirits have feasted, the real fun begins. It is not strange to us that spirits do not have ravenous appetites, and that the bulk of the stuff remains. Upon these remnants the old men and women, the young men and maidens, the boys and girls feast themselves to the full, making merry, carousing and wrangling until the “wee sma’ hours of the morning.” Thus far we have spoken of ancestral worship at its best, and we perhaps have seen much in it that has commanded our approving sympathy.

Ancestral worship is not thoroughly bad by any means. Verily there is much in it that is excellent. It has some features about it that are embodied in the precepts of the fifth commandment of the Decalogue; and there is also a great deal in it similar to our ideas embodied in our State and national demonstrations in honor of our illustrious statesmen and soldier heroes, or as witnessed on our Decoration Day and other anniversaries of like nature.

But there is another side which, if left undiscovered, would be to leave us in ignorance of the real intents and purposes of the system. If the people would confine themselves to the mere honoring of the dead as we honor our dead—if there were less of formality and more of sincerity—then it might command our full approval and sympathy. But in that act of worship it is made abominable, because they make the dead ancestor “the correlate of Heaven” (God), and so violate and destroy any good there may be in it. In addition to the first quotation from Confucius, in the same paragraph we have this remarkable utterance: “In reverential awe shown to one’s father, there is nothing greater than making him the correlate of Heaven.”

In every one of these tablets the survivors believe there reside the spirits of the ancestors, who are dependent upon them for food, raiment, every necessity and pleasure of life, as they were when they dwelt among them in visible presence. Still more fatal is the belief that every spirit is a sort of “tutelary spirit,” a protector or destroyer, a benefactor or an avenger, one who blesses or curses, according to the generosity or neglect of the devotee. On account of this very element, so interwoven in the practice and the theory of the rite, it is impossible for a real Christianity to sanction or approve of it; to do so would be dangerous, to say the least, and probably disastrous to the cause of Christ.

If there is any idolatry in China, it is found in ancestral worship; and the Conference of Shanghai (1890) did no wiser thing than when it passed a resolution certifying that “idolatry is an essential constituent of ancestral worship.” Some would say, Modify it. How modify it? Eradicate