

MEDHURST'S CHINA.

Any information of the immensely extensive and populous territory of China is interesting to the christian and the philanthropist. Hitherto it has been thought impenetrable, its language impracticable, and continued separation from the great mass of mankind inevitable, and of the nature of a providential decree: now it seems that properly qualified persons, acting judiciously may enter it; the language of the country is attainable; and the efforts of christian benevolence, though coercion could do nothing, and commerce next to nothing, are likely to bring it into beneficial contact with the human race. From Mr. Medhurst's very valuable work, and which we are happy to find is for sale at Mr. C. H. Balcher's, we shall give under their proper heads as many extracts as our pages will allow. It may be well to mention that the work is written and published in aid of the cause of missions, and the diffusion of the Gospel in China.

CULTIVATION OF CHINA.

To the fertility of the soil, we may add the consideration that it is very extensively cultivated. China contains, as has been before observed, 830,719,360 English acres; and if we allow one-third of this area for hills, rivers, marshes, and waste lands, we shall have 553,812,906 acres for cultivable land. In ascertaining this, however, we are not left to conjecture; as there exists a report made to the Emperor Keen-lung, in the year 1745, of the amount of land then under cultivation; according to which it appears, that reckoning the land belonging to individuals with that in the possession of the Tartar standards, the military, the priests, and the literary, there were at that time 595,598,221 English acres under cultivation; since which period, a new estimate has given 640,579,381 English acres, as the total extent of occupied land in China. Thus it appears that more than three-fourths of the surface are owned and tilled by man; allowing, according to the highest census, nearly one acre and three quarters to each individual. The greatest part of this area is laid out exclusively in arable land, and devoted to the production of food for man alone. In China, the natives make no use of butter or cheese, and very seldom of milk; the principal animal food is pork, which is generally home-fed; they have few horses for travelling, pomp, or war; and the only cattle they keep are such as are needed in husbandry: hence, there are no grazing farms, no meadows, and very little pasture; while every acre of ground, capable of cultivation, is turned up by the spade or the plough in order to afford sustenance for the teeming inhabitants. The few beasts of burden for draught which they keep, are either tethered to a string by the side of the road, or turned out to graze on the hills; while they are supplied by night with a little straw or bean-stalks, which is also their principal food during the winter. A common is quite unusual throughout the Eastern half of China; while parks and pleasure-grounds are proportionably scarce as the anxiety to satisfy the appetite prevails over the desire of amusement.

INDUSTRY OF THE CHINESE.

The industry and skill of the Chinese, striving to produce as many of the necessaries of life as possible, would also argue a dense population, ever struggling against threatening want, and compelled to exert themselves for their daily bread. In tropical climates, where the ground is fertile and the population scanty, the natives find that by a few months' labour they can produce sufficient food for a whole year's consumption, and are therefore indisposed to exert themselves further. But in China, the inhabitants are incessantly employed; and every individual is obliged to be busy in contributing his quota to the common weal. Every one in the least acquainted with the manners of the Chinese, knows that they are untiring in their exertions to maintain themselves and families. In the business of agriculture they are more particularly active, raising two crops from the ground every year, extending their cultivation in every possible direction, and bringing the most unpromising spots into use, in order that nothing may be lost. Their skill in effecting these objects is not, considering their few advantages, contemptible. They thoroughly understand the importance of varying the crops; they know perfectly well the seasons and soils adapted for certain productions; and they are fully sensible of the importance of manuring the ground in order to maintain its fertility. A stranger is struck with this on first setting his foot on the shores of China. Almost every individual met with in the paths and fields is provided with a basket and a rake; and every evening the cottager brings home a certain quantity to add to the manure heap, which is a most important appendage to every dwelling. Having but few sheep and cattle, they are obliged to make the most of the stercoraceous stock of men and swine. This is carefully collected, and actually sold at so much per pound; while whole strings of city scavengers may be seen cheerily posting into the country every successive morning with their envied acquisitions; little heeding the olfactory nerves of the less interested passengers. Every other substance likely to answer the end is anxiously collected and carefully disposed, so as to provide for future exigencies; such as decayed animal and vegetable matter, the sweeping of streets, the mud of canals, burnt bones, lime; and, what is not little a singular, the short, stumpy human hair, shaven from millions of heads every ten days, is industriously gathered up, and sold for manure throughout the empire.

ECONOMICS OF DRESS AND ROOMS.

In their dress, the Chinese are alike anxious to economize the soil. Barrow says, that "an acre of cotton will clothe two or three hundred persons;" and as cotton can be planted between the rice crops, and thus vary the productions and relieve the soil, the Chinese prefer such clothing as they can raise at the least expense of ground and labour. Were the hundreds of millions of China to be clothed in woollens, an immense tract of grazing land would be required, which would deduct materially from the area devoted to food, and greatly exceed what the Chinese could afford. In their dwellings, likewise, they are particularly frugal of room: living together in a very small compass, and crowding into closely-built cities, as though ground with them were an object of great moment. A room twenty feet square would afford sufficient space for a dozen people to eat, drink, work, trade, and sleep; while the streets of their towns and cities are so narrow that it is quite possible to touch each side of the way with the hand as you pass along. Now if we compare this frugality with the extravagance of European nations in regard to room,—living on beef and mutton, and wearing woollen clothes,—we may easily see that the ground which would sustain one Englishman would be sufficient for the support of three or four Chinese. Amongst such a selfish and sensual people so much economy would not be observed did not stern necessity compel; and what greater necessity can exist than the difficulty of sustaining a crowded population from a contracted soil?

DIALOGUE WITH A CONFUCIAN.

At length, softening down, he said, "I see, Sir, that your anxiety to instruct the Chinese originates in a kind intention; but your books are filled with a few cunning remarks on an abstruse subject, mixed up with much that is unfounded. Our ancient philosophers taught the doctrine of filial piety, but left the mysterious subject of spiritual beings alone, as not intimately connected with the happiness of the people. In your books, every expression tends to this point; while the duties of the human relations are seldom referred to. This is neglecting the important and caring about the insignificant. Confucius cautioned men against paying too much attention to religious ceremonies, and forbade their flattering the gods to procure protection; but if ignorant people will busy themselves in begging for blessings, they only squander their own time and money and do no harm to others; why then trouble one's-self about them? The religious practices of men are as various as their minds; let every one follow his own inclinations, and not interfere with others."

Finding us determined, he left us, when another began. "You speak of this Jesus as a Saviour; pray whom does he save?" "All who believe," we replied. He resumed: "You talk of the forgiveness of sins; shall I obtain the forgiveness of sins by reading this book?" "If you follow its directions, and believe in the holy Saviour, you will." "What will this Saviour bestow on those who trust in him?" "He will take them to heaven." "Have you believed?" "I hope I have." "Has he taken you to heaven?" "I trust he will when I die." "Die! oh, you have to wait till death for all this: give me present enjoyment; who cares what will happen after death, when consciousness ceases?" So saying, he turned away.

OPPOSITE RELIGIONS OF THE CHINESE.

It is very singular, that China should have given birth, at the same time, to two remarkable men, differing essentially in their doctrines and views, each the founder of a system of religion and morals which has overspread and divided China, from their days to the present time. These individuals have been already referred to; viz., Confucius and Lao-tze, and their interview with each other recorded. Though they seem to have had a respect for each other, yet they do not appear to have combined or coalesced in the plans they laid down for the instruction of posterity. Of Confucius it is said, that he never spoke of the strange and marvellous, and sought to fix men's attention on the duties of the human relations; while the other inculcated a contempt for worldly greatness and domestic happiness—placing the chief good in mental abstraction, and professing to deal much with the spiritual world. The one erred in being too sceptical, and the other in being too superstitious; yet they have both retained their hold of the mind of China, even to the present day, and it is difficult now to say, which system is most prevalent throughout the empire.

EXTENSIVE USE OF THE CHINESE CHARACTERS.

But the Chinese are not only living under one form of despotic rule; they possess, likewise, one universal language and literature. It is a remarkable fact, that, notwithstanding the spoken dialects of each province and county vary so materially that the Chinese of different districts are absolutely unintelligible to each other, yet the written medium of the whole empire is easily understood by all; and writing, instead of speaking, constitutes the universal method of exchanging ideas. The Chinese written language, being symbolical, and the same symbols being used to designate certain significations, whatever sounds be attached to the character, each instructed person readily understands a book, though he may use a different dialect from the writer. It is remarkable, further, that not only are the same signs employed for

certain ideas, in all parts of the country, but the same style is used. The disposal of the characters, as well as the characters themselves, is according to one uniform method; so that a person able to write well, in Chinese, no matter what may be his native dialect, is intelligible to the remotest borders of the empire. Yea, even beyond the limits of Chinese rule, the Chinese character and style are understood, and throughout Cochinchina, Corea, and Japan the same mode of writing is current and legible. Thus a book once composed in the customary Chinese style, if intelligible to one learned man, would be intelligible to all; and might travel among the hundreds of millions inhabiting south-eastern Asia, communicating intelligence throughout the whole region. What a stimulus does this afford to an active and energetic mind, while engaged in studying the Chinese language, or inditing a book for their instruction, that he is doing what may be available to the benefit of so many millions, and that to the latest generation! Such a book needs only to be multiplied and circulated, without undergoing the slightest alteration in order to enlighten and edify one-third of the human race.

EXTRAORDINARY MEMORIES OF CHINESE SCHOLARS.

The first business of a Chinese student, is, to commit the whole of these books and classics [of Confucius and his disciples] to memory, without which he cannot have the least chance of succeeding. The text of these nine works, is equal in bulk to the New Testament; and it is not hazardous too much to say, that, were every copy annihilated to-day, there are a million of people who would restore the whole to-morrow. Having been composed at a very early period, and somewhat mutilated in the time of Che Hwang te, it necessarily follows, that there are several indistinct passages, unintelligible to the people of the present day. Hence commentaries have been found necessary, and a very celebrated writer, who flourished about the twelfth century, called Chou-foo-tze, has composed an extensive exposition of the whole. This commentary is likewise committed to memory by the student, and his mind must be familiar with whatever has been written on the subject. The number and variety of explanatory works, designed to elucidate the Chinese classics, show in what estimation these writings are held, and what an extensive influence they exert over the mind of China. A Chinese author says, that the expositors of the four books are more than one thousand in number. The style and sentiment of all the moderns is greatly conformed to this ancient model, and the essays and exhortations of the present day, chiefly reiterations of the sentiments of their great master, and an incessant ringing of the changes on the five constant virtues, and the five human relations, which form the basis of moral philosophy in China. Even the Buddhist priests, and the followers of Taou, teach their disciples the books of Confucius, and nothing is looked upon as learning, in China, which does not emanate from this authorised and infallible source.

EXTENT AND VALUE OF EDUCATION IN CHINA.

The number of individuals acquainted with letters in China is amazingly great. One-half of the male population are able to read, while some mount the "cloudy ladder" of literary fame, and far exceed their companions. The general prevalence of learning in China may be ascribed to the system pursued at the literary examinations, by which none are admitted to office but those who have passed the ordeal with success, while each individual is allowed to try his skill in the public hall. Wealth, patronage, friends, or favour, are of no avail in procuring advancement: while talent, merit, diligence, and perseverance, even in the poorest and humblest individual, are almost sure of their appropriate reward. This is their principle, and their practice does not much vary from it. They have a proverb, that "while royalty is hereditary, office is not;" and the plan adopted at the public examinations is an illustration of it.

THE THREE RELIGIONS OF CHINA.

On reviewing the three systems, we find that Confucius taught his disciples nothing definite concerning God or the future world; his scheme of cosmogony is irrational and unsatisfactory; and his compliance with the common superstitions, inconsistent and time-serving. The doctors of eternal reason makes use of some expressions respecting an underived and all-pervading principle; but they have mixed up so much superstitious nonsense with their system, and are such gross idolaters in practice, that we must pronounce them as far from the truth as the philosophic sect. While the religion of Buddha, imported from the west, though it talks about the retributions of a future life, and professes to manifest much compassion, yet in denying a first principle, and a last end; in contradicting the existence of an everlasting God, and eternal retribution; in deriving all things from nothing, and in making all things revert to nihility again, as the essence of being and the summit of bliss; has deluded the inhabitants of China still more than their indigenous systems, and left them to the blackness of darkness for ever.

It is very remarkable, however, that all the sects in China acknowledge a Trinity. The Confucians speak of the three powers of nature—heaven earth, and man; the Taonists have some reference to the "three pure ones," who combine in themselves the essence of eternal reason; and the Buddhists speak of the "three precious ones;" namely, the past, present, and future