

"God hath made upright" (Eccl. 7 : 29), turns from his Maker to follow his own imagination, even under conditions of circumstance and habit the most favorable for preserving the great fundamental truth of all true religion that "God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11 : 6). In this respect the religious history of China forms a complement and a contrast to that of the Hebrews. The former shows the process of degeneration at work uninterruptedly; the latter proves how it can be restrained and stopped only by the direct intervention of God Himself in guidance and revelation. Over and over again, in spite of law and of prophets, did the Jews commence to take the same downward course as the Chinese; and over and over again were they checked and turned back by the punishments and by the love of God. Not, indeed, till the captivity did they come—as a nation—to grasp once for all the foundation fact which is embodied in the First Commandment, and to finally shake themselves clear of the sin condemned in the Second. Truly neither a man nor a nation can return to God, can do aught but wander from God, "except the Father draw him."

The four steps of declension were, of course, *not sudden but gradual*. Thus as to the *first*: it is true that at the date of the earliest authentic records\*—say, before the twelfth century B.C., the supreme object of worship was one High God, who governed all the affairs of men with all-pervading righteousness and goodness. Yet even in those writings there is clear proof that there was associated with that worship, though in a secondary degree, the worship of spirits of the departed and of tutelary deities (canonized heroes or sages) who presided over individual families, or localities or arts, under the supreme governance of God. Such secondary worship was very similar in not a few respects to that accorded to saints in Roman Catholic countries. It is also true that with religious observances there was combined the use of divination in conjunction with previous purification, fasting, and prayer—divination seemingly not very different to that alluded to in the history of Joseph, of Balaam, and of others in the earlier parts of the Old Testament. But it is no less clear that idolatry was not practised,† and that morality—political, social, and personal—rested for its sanction directly on the relation of man to the supreme Ruler of the universe. The title given to Him is never used in

\* The earlier national odes, which, with later odes, make up the *Si-King* or Book of Poetry—a classic which Confucius regarded with veneration, and spoke of as a most important subject for moral study. For authenticity and dates see Professor Legge's *Prolegomena* to the *Si-King* in his *Chinese Classics*.

† The great Chinese historian, Sze Ma-Ts'ien (of the first century B.C.), whose work is still the standard history, narrates (in the *Annals of Yin*) how that "King Wu-Yih (one of the last kings of the Yin dynasty) was not virtuous. He made a statue in human form, and called it (by the name of) a heavenly spirit. As if it had intelligence, he made demands upon it. (Shortly afterward), when hunting, he was struck dead by lightning." His sons followed in his steps, and his dynasty in the third generation later was accordingly destroyed. "These (and other similar facts) show clearly," says Sze Ma-Ts'ien in his essay on "The Worship of Heaven and Earth," "that all the dynasties without exception owed their establishment to piety and reverence, but fell little by little through negligence (in regard to those duties)."