

THE KITCHEN GOD.

AND then, besides all these gods in the temples, there are at least two shrines in every house—one to the ancestors and one for the kitchen god. It is said that there is not a house in China, rich or poor, that has not a picture of the latter pasted over the fireplace, and this picture is worshipped by the whole family, both with prayers and sacrifices, for it is believed that at the end of the year he carries a report of each member of the family to his brother, the "Venerable Man of the Sky." Three times in a year, and at other times should they be in sickness or trouble, the family burn paper money and incense and spread wine and soup before the god, bowing down before him four times and praying aloud that he will accept their offerings and preside in their family. At the end of the year they offer in addition to all these things, cakes and fruit and candy, with the hope that, having a sweet taste in his mouth, he will say only sweet and pleasant things about them to his brother! If he should report ill of them, they must expect calamities and trouble the following year.

When the offerings are all spread out they tear down the old picture of the god (they call him *Tsaow Wong*) from the fireplace and burn it, thus starting him off in his flight. As it burns they prostrate themselves and repeat in a sort of rhyme something like this:

"Our *Tsaow Wong* to-night for heaven must start—
Come eat of our offerings before you depart.
Here are cakes, dates, and pears, all good as you
know,

And a handful of candy, to eat as you go.
And when you get there and report for the year,
Please say to your brother, we're good people here;
Don't mention our bad deeds, no, never a tittle,
But tell all our good deeds, make much out of little.
Say we're honest and upright, and for us entreat
Much peace and good fortune, with plenty to eat;
Let sickness and poverty never come near,
Make us happy and prosperous all through the year.
If blessings like these you bring with you back,
You and we will enjoy them, of good have no lack.
And now up the chimney, quick; haste you away—
We'll look for you back on the thirtieth day."

In some places they seal up the god's lips with a sweet, sticky candy called *t'ang*. They make a shorter speech, like this:

"Come, god of the kitchen,
Oh, Grandfather Chang!
Come, here is your pudding
And here is your *t'ang*."

Go flit up to heaven,
Be gone in a trice;
Forget all the bad
And tell only what's nice."

During the next seven days there is no picture of *Tsaow Wong* on the wall, but every family buys a new one ready for the New Year. These are printed on thin paper in gaudy colors, and on the same sheet is a sort of almanac, giving the number of days in each month and the time of the regular feasts of the year. The common price is from three to five cash, which is less than half a cent, so you see gods don't cost much in China.

The Chinese have three, we might almost say four, religions. There is, first, Confucianism, which we should hardly call a religion, for it tells only how to live in this life, and teaches nothing about God. Then there is Taoism, which has become a kind of demon worship, and has many idols (for the Chinese are all the time afraid of evil spirits), and Buddhism, a form of idolatry which was brought into China from India nearly two thousand years ago. But most of all, there is Ancestral Worship, which is older even than Confucianism, and in which all classes of people believe and engage. Tablets twelve or fifteen inches high, on which are carved the names of the ancestors, are kept in each house, and before them every day incense is burned, as well as money and paper clothing for their use in the next world.—*Foreign Mission Journal*.

Two missionaries stood near one of the great temples of India. A woman approached, carrying a little child in her arms. She took no notice of the strangers, but when she reached the foot of the temple steps, threw herself upon the ground holding the baby up in her arms. The baby was ill-shapen, and had none of the beauty and loveliness which characterize infant life. Then she prayed this prayer: "Oh, grant that my child may grow fair as other children. Grant that it may grow comely. Grant that it may grow strong. Hear the cry of a mother's breaking heart." Her prayer finished, she arose and started away, when one of the strangers said, "Friend, to whom have you prayed?" She replied, "I don't know, but surely, somewhere there must be someone to hear the cry of a mother, and to keep a mother's heart from breaking."—*Helping Hand*.