

ART. VII.—*Remarks on the present state of Buddhism in China.*  
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PREFATORY REMARKS BY COLONEL SYKES.

[THE following paper upon the present state of Buddhism in China, by the late Dr. Gutzlaff, was drawn up at my request, and was received by me scarcely a fortnight before the intelligence of his death arrived. He appears to picture the practice of Buddhism as it now meets the eye in China, rather than as inculcated in the precepts of its founder; and in consequence both clergy and laity testify to the corruptions which have gradually disfigured its primitive character. Dr. Gutzlaff's very strong language with respect to the ignorance, selfish habits, chicanery, mendacity, mendicancy, and idleness of the priesthood (mendicancy and contemplation, however, being ordinances of Buddhism), contrasted with his conflicting statements that the priesthood is generally despised yet popular, may have been influenced by his religious enthusiasm, which, although he had ceased to labour as a missionary, manifested itself to the last in his connexion with the Chinese Christian Union. Dr. Gutzlaff does not give much that is new with respect to Buddhism, but the paper is interesting as a *resumé*, and affords corroborative evidence to the writings of others. His account of the Páli works in Chinese characters discourages us from the expectation of learning much from them; but in case a few of them could be transcribed according to the sounds into some known character, they would become legible to a good Páli scholar. But he says there are a few works in a character originally used for writing Páli, and they may be considered faithful transcripts of the earliest writings of Buddhism. That they are looked upon as being sacred, full of mysteries, and high signification, and therefore as the great precious relics of the founder of the creed; that with the *letters* of the *alphabet* (used in these books), the priests perform incantations, expel demons, rescue souls from hell, &c.; and the priests maintain that the very demons tremble at the recitations. We have examples of such letters in the *To-lo-ne*, or Book of Incantations, which accompanied this notice; and several columns of the letters appeared in the Chinese Junk, which lay for so long a time in the Thames: these letters the Chinese on board said were so sacred that they would not give copies of them to any one, and Professor Wilson only obtained copies by

employing a European. Now if the most ancient Páli books in China are written in this alphabet, it may be supposed that it was the character used by Fa Hian in transcribing the Buddhist sacred books; and that these books in India were in this character, and that it should therefore be the Páli alphabet of the time. Such does not appear to be exactly the case. The letters have a certain Lath alphabet aspect, but we have obtained too few of them to form a proper opinion upon their phonetic value; and for the solution of the question we must look to the good fortune of obtaining one of the volumes from China, of which mention is made by Dr. Gutzlaff. It is to be regretted that Dr. Gutzlaff could not obtain any numerical details of the temples, monasteries, and priesthood, from which an approximate judgment might have been formed of the real position of Buddhism, at present, in China; and for which his own vague estimates afford no assistance. It is known that Buddhism is not the religion of the state; but it is generally supposed in Europe that the people at large profess Buddhist doctrines; but if Dr. Gutzlaff's opinion be well-founded, Buddhism is not the creed of the people, and its rites are only occasionally had recourse to for personal objects. Had Dr. Gutzlaff also furnished us with more elaborate and specific details of the precepts and practices of Chinese Buddhism, we should have had the means of comparing them with the precepts and practices of Ceylon Buddhism so minutely and graphically detailed in the Rev. Spence Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism and Monachism of the East*. Dr. Gutzlaff's paper is nevertheless an interesting contribution, which is peculiarly acceptable at the present time, when a religious revolution is in progress in China.]

THE idea prevalent in this country respecting the rise and progress of Buddhism is perhaps scarcely to be accounted for, unless the Chinese character is taken into consideration. The original importation of this superstition into China, from India, is of itself an extraordinary event. It was in the first century that this event took place, at the suggestion of an emperor, who had dreamt that the Holy One, of whom the ancient native odes had made mention, and to whom Kung-foo-tze had referred, was born in the west. Yet from the foundation of the Chinese monarchy until that day, the princes as well as the people cared nothing for the events of foreign lands: all foreigners were distinctly ranked amongst barbarians, sunk in ignorance and mental darkness, of whom nothing could be learnt. If civilization was to be anywhere introduced, it must be by the principles of Chinese wisdom, without which everything was absurdity. In this instance (and this is the only one), the Chinese deviated from their unalterable

principles: they introduced a foreign creed as distinct from their own ideas and existing systems as it was possible for any tenets to be.

China, at that time, had received the doctrines of Kung-foo-tze as the only true ones to be depended upon. A short persecution of the literati under Che-hwang-te (246 B.C.), had rather strengthened the adherence of the nation to those axioms. Gradually they came into such repute that only those who professed them were eligible to office, and considered capable of ruling the nation. Whenever emoluments and honours attend the profession of certain principles, we may rest assured that the followers will be numerous, and that they will express their disdain of other opinions, which, no doubt, are below their notice. This pride and self-sufficiency was, at that time, general amongst all the literati, and is so up to this moment, presenting perhaps the greatest bar to the introduction of foreign systems. According to the ideas of Kung-foo-tze, all nature was deified; in every part of it some spiritual being was found to preside; and heaven and earth were the great moving bodies by which all things were produced. If we add to this the adoration of one's own species in the worship of ancestors, the whole system will be placed in its true light. Quite an opposite direction took the rationalists. Their great leader, Laou Keun, had introduced them into the vagaries of an invisible world of his own creation: they saw nothing but spirits and hidden agents; and theirs was a polytheism according to which all parts of nature were peopled by beings that claimed the homage of the human race. But their doctrines were mysteries, ill fitted for the great mass of the people, and denounced as absurd by the literati.

The apathy of the Chinese nation towards all things that are beyond the senses is proverbial: whatever they cannot feel, see, taste, or hear,—whatever gives not immediate enjoyment or advantage, is despised and rejected, and will never attract their attention, or engage their sympathy. The Chinese know only things as they exist for the present, and are wilfully ignorant of the future. All speculations upon this point are discarded as useless vagaries by the sages, and denounced as mere phantoms.

Yet under all these disadvantages Buddhism gained ground. At first it was the weakness of an effeminate court that favoured the foreign superstition. Subsequently, however, the common people accepted its tenets; and the religion spread, notwithstanding all the learned could say against it, over a very great part of the Empire. It passed through many vicissitudes, yet retained its original features, strongly tinged with Chinese national sentiments. The Chinese are a people far superior in their civilization to the Hindus, whom they

despise with all their heart: yet they held religious tenets which were discarded even in India at a remote time, whilst feeling that they were fables incongruous to their rational mode of thinking. Hence arises the most anomalous state in which a nation can possibly be found; viz. the profession of a religion, on the one hand, which they ridicule on the other. In judging of Chinese Buddhism we ought never to lose sight of this peculiar feature in their belief.

I shall now succinctly detail the doctrines, the institutions, and the influence exercised by Buddhism on the Chinese nation.

The doctrines are taken from the Prákrit, and are contained in the King, or sacred books (Sútra); the Keae, or Keaou Heun (Vinaya); and the Discourses, Lun (Abhidharma). They are also comprised under the name of San Tsang (three whole, Tri-Píthiká), and constitute an immense mass of books, which exceeds perhaps ten thousand. So far as we have been able to examine these books, they are, in the main, the same, and derived from the same source, as similar works in Páli, circulated in Ceylon, Siam, Burmah, and amongst the Laos, Tibetans, Mongols, &c. Most of the writers set at defiance all the rules of composition, and write an unintelligible jargon, which we much fear they themselves cannot comprehend. I have questioned the most learned and rational of Buddhist priests, who spend nearly their whole lives in studying these books, and they have honestly confessed that they have got themselves into a labyrinth from whence it is impossible to extricate themselves. The first promoters of Buddhism in China seem not to have been acquainted with the literature of this country, and gave themselves little trouble to translate their ideas into the language of the land. All they did was to convey the sound of their sacred books into the Chinese characters; and as these are pronounced as monosyllables, and the Páli is the very opposite, having words of ten and twenty syllables, the most extraordinary jargon ever invented by rational men was thus produced. It is scarcely readable, because, the Chinese sounds being low and ill-adapted to express those of the Páli language, it constitutes a dialect in itself, which has this peculiarity—that no one understands it. As it is, however, considered holy by the priests, and diligently taught by the friars, and recited with the greatest earnestness, it has kept for centuries its ascendancy; and books of this description exist in hundreds of editions. Their mode of writing, however, had a powerful effect in abridging the large original volumes, for to convey all their contents in the mode described would have required thrice the space. Much is therefore omitted; perhaps, on an average, three-fourths of the whole contents; and to render these volumes at least in some way attractive, there are passages

in Chinese interspersed to throw some light upon the contents, and communicate a few aphorisms of Buddhism. The above distinctions are carefully preserved, and the classical or sacred volumes are distinguished as such by sundry epithets. Most of them are entirely in Páli, and only read by the priests. The second class, or precepts, are partly translated, and the general principles given with a commentary. The third is the richest, and comprises an immense mass of legends and tales of such a wonderful nature that only India could have produced them. They are likewise in Páli, though often interlined with Chinese; and the little one can understand of them is sufficient to give a distaste for the other unintelligible parts. In the above are included formulas for prayers, incantations, the various missals, prayers of every description, supplications for delivering souls from purgatory, &c. Notwithstanding the diversity of their contents, there is unity in the whole from first to last; and the same books are used in all the temples of the empire. Having made many inquiries, I have not yet found a single priest capable of explaining the meaning. Some of the common words, the very shibboleths of Buddhism, were known to them; but the whole system, in all its bearings, and the essential tenets of their creed, appeared to them riddles. A few works are found in a character originally used for writing the Páli; and may be considered as faithful transcripts of the earliest writings of Buddhism. They are looked upon as very sacred, full of mysteries, and deep significations; and therefore as the most precious relics of the founder of their creed. With the letters of this alphabet, the priests perform incantations to expel demons, rescue souls from hell, bring down rain on the earth, remove calamities, &c.: they turn and twist them in every shape; and maintain that the very demons tremble at the recitation of them.

It is very doubtful whether the Chinese language could convey all the metaphysical nonsense which Buddhism contains; even if an attempt to translate it were made. What is known of this creed in China is of a more tangible shape, and has reference to something essential in life, to stimulate self-interest, and afford profit to the votary. A nation like this has very little consideration for other things; and here these are brought forward in very strong relief, so as not to be mistaken. One very general advantage held out by the priests to the common people is the high gradation to which they may attain after death by way of the metempsychosis. To be rich and powerful, to be born again with the command of vast revenues, is not to be slighted. Hence the frequent application to the Bonzes to ascertain by what means this end may be attained; and hence the many gratuitous promises given, on the payment of alms, to the liberal

believer, that he will assuredly attain his wishes. Another advantage professed by these charlatans must be added: they maintain that they have full and undisputed influence with the King of Hell; and that by the recitation of sundry incantations and prayers the souls of the doomed escape punishment. Whenever, therefore, a rich man in China dies, the priests invariably repair to his relations, and tell them in what a situation the poor departed soul is to be found. There are few people who are not touched with compassion in regard to those who were near and dear to them, and that will not willingly give a sum of money to have them rescued. Now begins a bargaining; so much money is paid down—the prayers commence—are continued for some time; and the King of Hades nevertheless remains unmoved. More money must be given—greater sacrifices be made—the incantations are renewed—whole Páli works are recited—the mystic alphabet is brought forward—and, behold! the priest declares that Rhadamanthus shows some compassion—various demons fly—and the tormentors leave off their practices. They have perhaps steeped the body in boiling oil—the misery experienced is extreme—and now the myrmidons that held it down remit their tortures—the head of the culprit emerges! Perhaps some demons saw the body asunder (for every soul coming into Hades is clothed with a new body)—now the supplication of the priest is heard—and they stop their operations. Still the situation of the condemned is perilous in the extreme—the torture is likely to be resumed the moment the prayers lose their efficacy—and hence the necessity of more fervent supplications. These are then not wanting; but money must in the end do the business: the greater the sum paid down to bribe the otherwise inexorable Lord of Hades, the more rapid the deliverance. Perhaps two days and three nights are spent in these mummeries; sum after sum is given; all stratagems to extort more are exhausted; and the wretched sufferer finally emerges from hell. Now, however, it becomes a question what to do next; he cannot remain in this intermediate state; and there is the nine-storied heaven—the lotus flower—the Paradise of the blessed—to which also access may be had, on due payment to the priest. Would the relatives not wish that the dear departed should enjoy those privileges? Yes; a little more money, and the object may be attained. Now a set of prayers is recited by another set of men; but the progress of the released is very slow until a round sum is given to speed the ascent. When such is the case, the praying is irresistible; and behold the man, destined to everlasting misery, now in the possession of bliss, at once pure and abiding!

Several European authors have written a great deal, and with

considerable tact, upon Buddhist metaphysics; and their superior education and knowledge have brought out an excellent digest of the doctrines. An examination of the original treatises and the commentaries leaves a very sad blank; and leads to the conviction that, with few exceptions, they constitute an impenetrable mass of nonsense. The writer, after the most careful and impartial examination of men and books, in China as well as in other countries that profess Buddhism, has come to this result.

The idols are many, and do not merely comprise those of countries where Buddhism is the religion of the state, but a great many more, because the priests admit any and every one for general adoration. The canonized founders of temples, heroes deified by the Chinese government, adored worthies, and strange gods, are promiscuously placed with those of Buddha. In one instance, a statue of Napoleon was put into the Pantheon, amidst a number of genii and hobgoblins. If any man has interest with the priest, he can, after his death, receive a place in the temple.

The principal idols most generally met with are three Buddhas—the past, present, and future; the latter is the most revered, for his advent and reign is soon expected. They are often represented in colossal forms, with negro features, curled hair dyed a light blue, thick lips, and flat, broad noses. In larger temples this triad is surrounded not only by ghastly, demon-like adjutants and messengers, but also by the disciples of the saint, in all possible positions, with every diversity of expression on their countenances, to depict horror, wrath, quiescence, benevolence, peace of mind, joy, &c. These figures, which are taken from life, and not worshipped, are often executed in the most masterly manner, and would not dishonour a Phidias. The writer once saw sixteen in a large building; they were admirably placed, and so full of life and vigour, that he does not remember to have met anything similar in all Asia. The idols are generally represented in the most unnatural manner, the painting being a mere daub, and the execution of the figures clumsy; but there are often found images representing events in the idol's history, which are executed with a considerable share of genius. Men arrayed in battle, snorting horses, crouching tigers, and fierce lions, are represented to admiration. In one of the temples the writer saw, in beautiful stucco, the scene where Kwan-yin, the Goddess of Mercy, looks down from heaven upon the lonely Noah in his ark, amidst the raging waves of the deluge, with the dolphins swimming around as his last means of safety; and the dove, with an olive-branch in its beak, flying towards the vessel; nothing could have exceeded the beauty of the execution.

Kwan-yin, the Goddess of Mercy, so well known in Hindu mythology, is very generally worshipped. She is the patroness of child-bearing women, and of all people in distress; always kind, and ready with her many arms to do good to any one. Her grim companions, generally fierce-looking, ruffian-like warriors, present a strange contrast to her. To her many miracles are constantly ascribed. She has also places of pilgrimage which myriads visit, and whither votive offerings are brought; indeed, she may be said to be the most popular of all idols, and obtains great credit for her deeds. For instance, during the war with England, her temple at Canton was used as a powder-magazine. On this occasion, she is reported by the commissioners as having received congreve rockets and shells in her lap, and thus saved the city. She was therefore promoted several steps by the Emperor, who holds, as the Son of Heaven, the control of all the gods and genii. Almost equal with her, though of Chinese origin, is the Queen of Heaven, Ma-tsoo-poo, "the holy mother," whose worship was introduced into the country some centuries ago. She is so strikingly alike, in her whole character and figure, to the Virgin, that the Chinese at Macao call her Santa Maria de China. The sailors make her especially an object of adoration; and there are very few junks that have not an image of her on board. She is also accompanied by very dismal satellites, the executors of her behests.

The gods, strictly speaking, are divided into four classes, an arrangement very imperfectly attended to:—Gods of the World, who have a very powerful influence upon human affairs; Gods by Birth; the Gods of Purity; and the Gods of Justice, or Bodhi-Satwas; they are all promiscuously called by the Chinese "Poosa." Men can rise to these stations by observing the law, by attaining certain perfections, by contemplation, by suppressing the desires so as to arrive at a state of apathy, and by translations, or preparatives of sublime enjoyment. Then there comes the whole catalogue of superior beings, who are exalted above men, such as the celestial dragons, devas or inferior gods, &c. The inventors of these absurdities seem to have nominated at pleasure the host of adorable beings, and to have invented at random stories to adorn their fictitious creations. But all seem to have forgotten that there must be an originating cause, and that without this influence and direction, the condition of the world would be mere chaos. It is heresy to talk of a causation, or a primary author, for all things have existed since numberless kalpas, and by their natural tendency return to annihilation. Why, then, so much trouble, so many changes; or a priesthood, or form of religion? This is a question frequently put, but never satisfactorily answered.

The Buddhistical *Fau-lau-ma* appears to be the Indian *Brahma*. Much power is ascribed to him, and his influence not only extends to those who study purity, and endeavour to obtain translation, but likewise over invisible beings. Many gilded images, very like those in Siam, are found in various temples, representing this idol. Then comes the celestial emperor (*Indra*); he is the lord of the abode of thirty-three gods, and possesses considerable power, which is, however, somewhat restricted, and very little concerns mankind. He has a band of musicians, who perform in the heavenly orchestra, and stand very high in regard to their skill, being genii endowed with great powers. On the other hand, it is remarkable that the gods are thought to partake of mortality; the virtuous and austere, when born again, ascend higher, and become an *Indra* or *Brahma*, only if they have followed *Buddha's* behests; on the other hand, if they have not attended to his injunctions, they are hurled back by irresistible force to the world of desires, and become even worse than common mortals. The gradations are therefore not fixed, and each being may rise to the highest dignity. The question, Who arranges all these changes, who rules and directs? remains unanswered. It is a grand machinery, without an intellectual propelling power. *Buddha* has something to say, but he is not supreme; there are many *Buddhas*—every one can become one; and the whole system seems to be an instinctive, revolving chaos. Time and space are in an equal manner most inhumanly, if we may use the expression, married; *kalpas*, with millions and billions of years, are spoken of; and the human spirit is transported into immensity to lose itself in fathomless absurdities.

To please the Chinese, *Buddha's* priests have adapted their mythology to the genius of the nation. There are gods of the different classes of traders, mostly deified worthies; gods of riches, gain, war, &c. They do not, strictly speaking, belong exclusively to the creed, but are found in most temples associated with others of Indian origin. The Pantheon, according to the Chinese taste, is an extraordinary medley, of which no traces exist in Siam or Ceylon. The *Bonzes* have amalgamated all idolatrous ideas in their own chaos, and, to please all, present every variety of objects for adoration.

The worship of these statues, which are generally made of clay, some gilded, some daubed with colours, depends mostly upon the priests; the common people partake little in the rites, and, if so, it is not exclusively to Buddhism that they show their veneration. An incense-stand is on every altar, and a quantity of sandal-wood and other perfumes, in the shape of small sticks, are constantly burnt, attended by the beating of a great drum, or the ringing of a bell in

the larger temples, to rouse the attention of the gods. The injunctions of Buddha to preserve life are treated with mockery, as the Chinese bring many offerings of meat and pastry, as well as of fruits and liquors; all are well prepared, and are ready to be eaten after they have stood in the temple for some time. They show an especial fondness for whole pigs, varnished of a deep yellow hue; or a he-goat, with the horns on, neatly adorned. These things remain then for a short time before or on the altar; the priest murmurs a few prayers; the devotee prostrates himself and kneels; and the whole is then taken away to be devoured by the guests who attend the ceremony. These offerings are brought only on great festivals, and the temples remain forsaken at other times, being tenanted by idle boys, gamblers, and travellers. Many of the temples have a stage opposite, on which, at certain occasions, pieces are performed for the amusement of the community at large.

Strictly speaking, there are no festivals celebrated exclusively by the Buddhists, except perhaps the birthday and ascension of Kwan-yin, the birthday of Foo-lac (Buddha), and a few others, in which the nation takes a share. But the priests are by no means particular, and mingle in the festivities of all other sects; wherever there is merry-making, whatever the pretence or circumstances, they are sure to be found present. Their temples are always open; every one may have prayers offered there, if he only pay, for whatever object he pleases: there is no limit to devotions. And if any one, from opposite feelings, should wish to desecrate a temple for a time, the priests would not object to it, if it were only paid for. All is pay—no other consideration but that is ever taken into account. Travellers of rank, who happen to take up their lodging in a temple, very frequently order the idols, which they deem inferior in dignity to themselves, to be taken down during the time of their abode. When whole communities, on account of some public calamity, go to a temple to call upon Buddha, or other saint, and when their prayers and supplications remain without an answer, they often turn against and destroy the images, dragging them with ignominy through the streets, and annihilating them, so that not a single trace remains. The priests plead not for their preservation, but avail themselves of the next opportunity to collect money for the construction of a different set of images, more to the taste of the community.

The ten precepts are only binding upon the priests; for the vulgar no specific rules are given: but these are embodied in a very popular work, "The Whole Duty of Man," containing many things which are useful and excellent, drawn from original Chinese laws, mixed with

much which is ridiculous and absurd. The four first commandments—not to kill any living being, however small the insect or worm; not to steal; not to commit adultery; not to lie—are for the whole world. The six others are more especially for the priests, viz., not to drink wine, because the juice of the grape, and every spirituous liquor, becomes in hell a stream of liquid fire, which the drunkard has to gulp down; not to sit on a raised seat; not to have a gaudy dress; not to be fond of the vanities of the world; not to wear ornaments of gold and silver; and not to eat in the afternoon. But for the mendicants and friars there are two hundred and eighty other rules that lead to perfection, and are considered of the utmost importance for those who wish to rise to a sublime state of contemplation. Most of them are of the most trivial nature, and adapted to a life of idleness. The mendicants hold a very high rank in the creed, because they are holy men, who have in so far subdued their passions as to care no more for the goods of the world. They must, however, not apply for alms to bad women, kings, butchers, tavern-keepers, or play-actors. The Chinese in general, who consider them as idle vagabonds, pay very little respect to their sanctity; and many a mandarin has frequently obliged them to work hard, in order to gain a livelihood for themselves.

The precepts themselves appear under three heads:—Rules for self-control of one's passions (*Polo thi moo sha*, in barbarous Chinese Páli); the *Pene* (*Vinaya*) for regulating the desires; and the *Shelo*, or prohibitions. These are considered very sacred, and worthy of the most careful practice. To submit self to reason, and to extinguish desires, seems to be the end of all teaching. Man becomes unhappy because he follows his passions; man becomes happy in the same degree as he masters them; their total absence is the highest state of bliss; to root them out entirely the principal endeavour of the devotee. A quiescent state, in which nothing can affect the human breast, a state approaching even to total insensibility and apathy, a gradual change of the vital soul of man to a mere automaton, is the aim of the various moral injunctions with which Buddhistical ethics abound.

For an individual totally unacquainted with the maxims of Buddhism, the stupid, unmeaning look of its votaries, and their total unfitness for the duties of life, except the performance of mere menial service, seem a riddle. But it is the extinction of all desires, of every mental effort, of every thought, that constitutes the very acme of perfectibility, or, rather, Buddhistical wisdom. It is partly on this account that the priests are so much despised, and treated with sovereign contempt.

They, however, indemnify themselves by impressing on the multitude that they hold some control over the metempsychosis, to which all living beings are subject. Now, as it is no matter of indifference whether the soul enters a spider, or becomes the tenant of an elephant, or is born as a god in paradise, or even becomes a Buddha, the minds of the credulous votaries are constantly kept alive to aim at one object, viz., to escape being born again in some wretched form, such as a hungry demon, or a hump-backed beggar. It is extraordinary to witness the delusion of the human mind, and the confidence with which such vagaries are received as truth. The human mind is disturbed—awful sentiments arise—and amidst the vague uncertainty of future existence, the priests manage to make the souls of men captive.

No attention is shown to the great precept of Buddhism, to maintain life. The Chinese are an omnivorous race; few living beings escape being made food for men, and are slaughtered and eaten without the least scruple. But to show some regard for life, notwithstanding, they now and then dedicate some pigs to Buddha, which are permitted to live their natural space of life, and are never killed. These fat monsters are kept as sacred animals; and many a butcher considers himself exempt from all sin when he presents a porker to the priest. There are other atonements made for occasioning loss of life; and even a mosquito or a cockroach finds now and then a scrupulous murderer, who feels deep repentance for having caused the death of vermin. Some Buddhistical hermits, to expiate the transgressions of mankind, allow vermin of every description, even the most loathsome, to feed upon them, and often show their devotion by exhibiting to the populace those crawling insects. The common sense of the Chinese, however, reprobates such disgusting exhibitions, and laughs at the idea that killing creatures for man's use or comfort is a sin.

The institutions of the Buddhist priesthood are very numerous, and all, with the exception of a few temples in the capital, on the voluntary principle. Their temples are spread over the whole country, and are generally built on the most romantic sites that can be found, in order to make an impression. The most common are one story high, with a single bell, and a set of idols, varying according to the patron in honour of whom it was built. At the door are very commonly some colossal guardians, grotesque figures, with spears and other weapons, modelled according to the fashion of ancient Chinese warriors. In many fanes is a small stage, on which the play-actors, at festive occasions, appear, to perform their dramas in honour of the gods. There is an altar on which an incense-stand is placed, generally

a tripod for burning gilt paper, and behind that is a row of idols. On the walls historical or natural scenes are often painted, and the idol shrine is adorned with artificial flowers, and other trifling ornaments. At the side there hang strips of yellow paper, with sentences in rhyme: these are duly ticketed, and when a devotee draws a lot from a bundle of bamboo slips, he seeks the solution of the oracle in these pieces of paper. This is a very common mode of divination. Another mode is for the votaries to throw two pieces of wood, shaped like kidneys, and to determine, by the manner in which they fall, what will be their fate. The larger temples have from five to six halls after each other, every one having a different idol in it, and often a whole row of the same. In most the Negro features prevail. There is abundance of decoration, bridges, pillars, tanks with lotus flowers, and other ornaments descriptive of Buddhistical mythology, or of the adumbrating nine-storied heaven. In the larger fanes there are likewise numerous representations of demi-gods, worthies, heroes of the past, &c., who stand modestly either at the entrance or in the background. Great ingenuity is shown in placing fanciful objects within the view of the spectator, unnatural figures generally being placed in the foreground. Most of the images are of clay, very brittle, and do not last any length of time. The temples are generally built of brick, without a ceiling, with dragons in the roof, and now and then, in imitation of the imperial palace, with yellow tiles. Near to many of these edifices there are pagodas of various heights; the most conspicuous is a prototype of heaven, of nine stories. They have been so frequently described as not to need here any further notice. The temples stand the whole day open; to some, priests are attached, to others not. When the latter is the case, they chant in a monotonous manner in the morning and evening, beat with two sticks upon a piece of hollow wood, and repeat the name of their god. In larger establishments the gong is beat, and mass regularly read, at which ceremony a great number of priests attend. The tapers are lighted, incense burnt, prostrations performed, and the crowd retires. Few, if any, of the common people attend at these ceremonies; they are only for the priesthood, not for the laity: these only come there on festive occasions, to bring their offerings, to induce the priest to recite a prayer, and to bow down in rotation before the idols. Some women also go thither, to dedicate their children to the images; others to ask favours in time of need; and some regularly to perform worship; but this is generally done in the houses, according to the principles of the ancient Chinese.

The priests live generally in the side apartments, and have a very

sombre-looking abode, where they pass their time. Many are, for the greater part of their time, absent on begging expeditions, and only return when they have collected a store. The whole establishment is on the mendicant principle. The Bonzos are taken young into the service; and if there are no volunteers, young boys are bought; their heads are then shaven; they wear a yellow dress; and commence the recitation of short prayers; whilst, at the same time, they perform the duties of scullions and menial servants. Finally they are ordained. There are several gradations, according to the degree of sanctity; but in all large establishments the Chinese Government chooses the high priest, and does not allow any one to hold that supreme command in a monastery except by its express order. Nearly all the priests belong to the lowest orders of society, often to the very scum. They are without education, and understand merely the routine of the ceremonies, and nothing else. Few can read, excepting their breviary. They walk generally barefoot, or with wooden sandals, without any leather on them; with the ample robes of Buddhist priests as worn in foreign countries, and without a covering for their shorn heads. In the estimation of the common people they are below the barber—a profession much despised; and even a peasant would not allow one to sit down with him in the same place. In the temple itself they perform all the menial offices of tavern-keepers, whenever guests happen to come. As there are not many hotels in the country, the temples are the most decent lodgments to which a traveller can go; and the attendance, as well as fare, is of the best description. In many places, temples are the refuge of gamblers, vagabonds, and thieves, who assemble there regularly; and it is very difficult to avoid being robbed when once within their clutches. The larger establishments, where many devotees assemble, have regular refectories, with commodious apartments, in which pilgrims are received and well entertained.

Many of the temples have land, and there are some which may be called rich, like the large building of the Honan establishment at Canton, or the Kin-shan, the Yang-tszo-Keang, and Pooto, near Chusan, with many others. The property consists of lands bequeathed by devotees. It might perhaps be sufficient for the maintenance of the numberless priests attached to the service, if the superintendents were not in the habit of embezzling most of the possessions, which forces the fraternity to keep religiously the vows of poverty. There is no temple which does not send out its mendicants; many of the priests, in fact, are nothing but beggars, and seldom perform the duties of their station. As the Chinese in general are very averse to

have anything to do with such vagrants, they frequently affix a notice to their doors, denying them admission, and drive them away. Theirs is therefore a hard life, and were it not for the compassion of the women, they would fare still worse. It is, however, by no means a rare circumstance to see them starving by the roadside. They seem to have an unconquerable aversion to labour, as mendicity is recommended to them by their founder, who considered the life of a beggar a holy one. The nuisance of their begging expeditions becomes often so great that Government interferes, and forces them to exert themselves. They are then turned into the fields, and must either cultivate the ground or starve. Otherwise, even the gardens attached to their convents are planted by laymen, and they do nothing but keep the vigils. A begging priest is considered as one of the highest proficients in this branch of his functions; and the cunning, deceit, and extraordinary energy they display may well excite the wonder of the beholders.

They do not exactly make a distinction between a priest and a friar, and both enjoy the same privileges. The latter, however, live in large communities, generally in neatly-built houses, constantly engaged, when at home, in some spiritual work. There are convents containing from fifty to one hundred, whose sole occupation consists in reading mass and observing vigils. They do their best to pass their time agreeably. Their cells are roomy, often neat; and they possess the common comforts of life. Vegetable diet is common, but many refrain from onions, garlic, &c., as too strong and too dainty. Rice is the prevailing nourishment, which they take in large quantities: otherwise, however, the brotherhood is by no means scrupulous about eating, and they will devour large pieces of meat if they can only get them, but the means are often wanting to satisfy their desires: when these, however, are to be obtained at the expense of others, no scruple exists. In this respect, they distinguish themselves from the Bonzes of Siam and Burmah. When entertaining strangers, they will not object to prepare a morsel of pork, or a fowl, and finish the remainder themselves; all this in the way of business. The theory is quite a different matter.

At most temples of any magnitude there are libraries; the most famous is on the island of Kin-shan; it was presented to the large monastery there by the Emperor Kang-li. There are many works consisting of one hundred volumes, published by subscription; and there are perhaps few works of Páli literature referring to Buddhism that have not found a transcriber in Chinese characters. A printing establishment is now and then added to the temple; and one may buy

several works, such as legends, breviaries, prayers said with beads, &c. Instruction, however, is nowhere communicated; and the only teaching that exists is a little smattering of Buddhism.

In talking of friars, we must not imagine that they are men who have made an irrevocable vow. Though under the promise of celibacy, many have been previously incontinent, and others leave their priesthood, without any legal impediment, and return to a secular life. Nor are the monks secluded during their abode in the convent; they can go out whenever they wish, and receive visitors at pleasure.

As a quite distinct race that have sprung from the latter, we must mention the hermits—persons that find immeasurable charms in repeating the name of Buddha, and that can look with extacy upon their navel for hours, yea, for days, and get into a state of mind in which they exhibit the most unheard-of vagaries. Such individuals frequently withdraw entirely from all contact with human beings, and repeat the words “O me to fūh” (*Om mane padme hom*) incessantly, day and night. The author himself has visited several of these emaciated beings, who, day and night, were thus engaged, and allowed themselves scarcely any rest, whilst living upon the most sparing food, being fully content with a little rice and vegetables that any charitable person may put before them, or fasting all night, if that be withheld. By a peculiar aberration of the mind, they seem to be lost to all outward impressions, living in a world of self-created fancies. This contemplative life is highly recommended, and nothing is considered such a high state of bliss as when a man, without moving, can sit for hours like an image, and lose himself. There is to them something bewitching in fixing their looks upon the navel, and in dreaming away their time, without once paying attention to exterior objects.

There are nunneries, yet not so numerous as the monasteries, and the inmates are comparatively few. The rules are nearly the same, adapted to the peculiarities of the sex. The women generally belong to the lowest classes, and are not seldom strumpets, who go there as the best refuge; otherwise, the abbesses buy young girls, who at a very early age are taught some prayers. The nuns employ themselves principally with their own sex, practice prognostication, write charms, say prayers, and endeavour to fix the ideas of women upon Buddha. In many places they have prayer-meetings, at which they preside, the devotees appearing with rosaries, and repeating the most unintelligible words. They also engage in intrigues of every description, make matches, nurse children, and make themselves now and then very useful. Still they share in the general ignominy of the priests, and the name of *Ne-Kao*, “nun,” is a bye-word and term of

reproach. Whenever Government perceives that they grow too numerous, they force them to marry, and destroy their houses. Poverty is likewise their lot, and any change of life must be welcome to them, as they have to lead the life of beggars.

No statistical returns have ever been made regarding the number of Buddhist priests. In stating it as one per cent. of the whole population, and their religious establishments at two-thirds of the whole of the religious edifices throughout China, we are probably not far from the mark. The Buddhists are decidedly the most popular and numerous sect; yet to include the whole population as Buddhists amongst whom there are a few temples erected, or even all those who contribute secretly towards the maintenance of the Buddhist worship, would be a misnomer. Those are only, strictly speaking, Buddhists who live in the temples; the mass of the people perform or neglect the rites quite at their pleasure. Few, from habits of devotion, cleave to the temples, but they never fail to shave their heads, and become Buddhists in every other respect.

The influence of the priests upon the people is very decided; though they are mere mendicants, they are numerous; and though neither learned nor revered, still they have not failed to establish some kind of ascendancy. This is principally to be ascribed to their holding the doctrine of existence after death,—a tenet not clearly demonstrated in the national system. Man has naturally a leaning to immortality, and no sophistry can ever uproot this deep-seated yearning. Though learned men may wantonly assert that the soul takes its flight with the body, and dissolves like all matter, there is a belief unconquerable, a certainty that no shallow arguments can eradicate, that the human being continues to exist, whatever may be the various vicissitudes of life, and the destination of the body. Whilst, therefore, the prevailing philosophy leaves an utter blank, the Buddhist priest supplies it, and says to the immortal spirit, "There is a very long life before you, and we give you the assurance that you may some day become a god, a Buddha, in immeasurable happiness, if you will listen to our suggestions." There are few who refuse such a boon when held out to them with earnestness and persuasion. They grasp at it; and though, after much reflection, doubts may arise as to adopting such vagaries as Buddhism presents, still they think that it is much better to abide by them than to have nothing to rely on: thus the error is propagated and maintained, often with great pertinacity, so as to be a ruling principle of life.

The inculcation of polytheism, the creation of numerous idols, the keeping the people in spiritual bondage, and the multiplying of objects

of worship, may indeed be laid to the account of the Bonzes. Without their constant appeal to beings of their own creation, that are said to have influence over the destiny of man, it is not very probable that there would ever have been in China so much gross idolatry. These vagaries are constantly in their mouths, and they talk about innumerable gods that claim the adoration of man; and hint that a faithful votary may rise to an equal rank. These things are not lost upon the vulgar. Wherever there is a nook, they erect an altar, or build a niche; there is not even a large green tree without some incense-stand; and the priests exclaim, "Behold, here your god resides!" As might have been expected, the priests have stultified the human mind, and made it a slave to the vilest superstition. The heart is hardened, turned away from the living God, and bows, against reason and better knowledge, before images of clay. Even here common sense greatly disapproves and reprobates the custom of the vulgar; and many Chinese laugh at the observance of rites which they at other times themselves perform. The learned have exerted their eloquence in dissuading the people from believing such absurd legends, which are moreover of foreign origin; yet the Chinese at large nevertheless listen. A stronger proof of a fallen nature could perhaps not be adduced.

The priests are mainly instrumental in making everything that appears under the name of religion ridiculous. They are in most instances poor, and must have recourse to the arts of charlatans to maintain themselves. However much this may be disguised, the facts are known to every one. If, therefore, this system is viewed as a mountebank's tale, it is not to be wondered at. The common people having once been accustomed to view a religion, the widest-spread amongst them, in that light, must naturally suppose that all other creeds contain the same vagaries. Hence, a contempt of all things beyond the senses, a ridicule of spiritual objects, and total aversion to listen to such matters.

In many instances, when Buddhism was in its glory, it often happened that the number of monasteries increased, and thousands became friars to spend a life of ease and comfort. Respecting such aberrations, the Chinese authorities are very sensitive. They reason that if every one puts not his hand to some work or other, there must arise starvation; for so many mouths are to be fed, and so many hands must work to do this. These institutions have thus been frequently destroyed, and the priests have been forced to turn their hands from the book to the plough. The effects of laziness, so much complained of in Siam and Burmah, arising from the most able-bodied men leaving

their occupations, and enlisting in the priesthood, is therefore not perceptible in China. Nor have they any influence in restraining the consumption of animal food, and promoting vegetable diet, which they so much advocate.

In every other respect, they may be considered as exercising no influence upon the people at large. If they were taken away bodily, their absence would probably not be regretted by any. They are the drones of society, useless and, in many instances, injurious appendages, and on that account of little moment. Their superstition has for a long while outgrown the nation; the temples are now mostly deserted and in a state of ruin, the votaries fewer and fewer, and the offerings very sparing. Large establishments, that were formerly in a very flourishing condition, have been partly abandoned, and stand entirely empty. China has in this respect, during the last twenty to forty years, undergone a very great change, and is still verging to a more important crisis. Had the priests learning, they might render themselves valuable instruments in promoting instruction; and did they profess any art useful to man, they might turn it to advantage, and appeal to the services which they had rendered. But they can show nothing but Buddhism and its concomitant evils, and can never, therefore, exercise a powerful ascendancy. The Government treats them with the utmost contempt. All men of learning look down upon the priests as the very dust of their feet; and even the ordinary man views them as a necessary evil. Yet, in the hour of death, under heavy calamities, and the decease of a loved relative, their assistance is called in to smooth the way to eternity, and give peace to the rebellious conscience. Even men in the higher ranks of life, who have succered at their delusions, often beseech them for a place and a dignified station in the metempsychosis.

Impartiality should prompt a writer to say all that he can in favour of adverse sects. But from the obscuration of the Bonzes, their stupidity, and their endeavours to retain others in the darkness of the grossest superstition, they find little favour with those who have the well-being of their fellow-creatures at heart. Some negative virtues, however, ought not to be denied to them. They have nothing obscene in their images or worship; the main charge that can be brought against them is that of being burlesque and unnatural; nor have they any cruel, unnatural rites, nothing which may not be performed in open daylight, before a multitude of people. As they exercise no moral influence, and are generally in the lowest grade of depravity, they cannot affect the manners of the people. The Bonzes, however, have one good point—they are very hospitable; they like

to wait upon strangers, and show those attentions in which a wayfaring man, when tired of his journey, so much delights.

Such is the actual aspect of Buddhism in China: the time perhaps will soon come when it will be spoken of as a religion that was. It will be a benefit for the Chinese nation to shake off this yoke of absurdities and sinful idolatry, and to bow before the only true God and Jesus Christ the Saviour.

[The writer of this paper died on the 9th August, 1851.—Ed.]