

## THE CHINESE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING.<sup>1</sup>

Communicated.

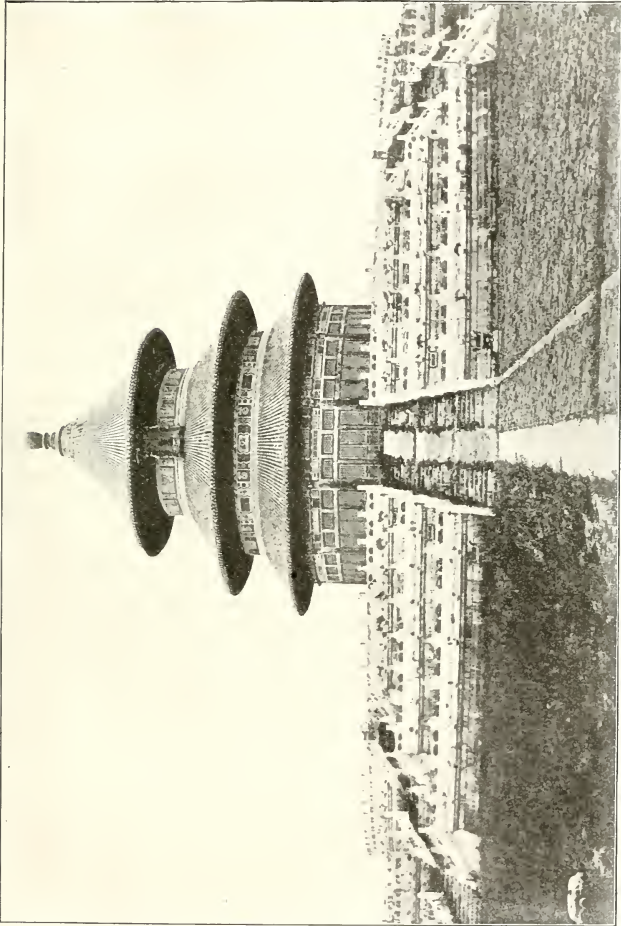
ON the southeast of the Altar of Heaven in Peking, at the distance of an arrow's flight, stands the Altar for Burnt Sacrifices. It is in the form of a large furnace faced with green porcelain, and it is nine feet high. It is ascended on three sides—east, south and west—by a green porcelain stair-case. Ever since the Chinese received the knowledge of the art of glazing in the fifth century they have been able greatly to improve the appearance of buildings by the use of colored tiles and colored bricks.

The bullock is placed inside the furnace altar upon a substantial iron grating, underneath which the fire is kindled. Through a door for the ashes on the north side, if I remember rightly, the grate may be seen, and I remember noticing the charred bones of the bullock over and under the grating. But they are better seen by the observer from the top by ascending one of the stair cases. The three stair cases are probably all used by those who carry the bullock, a male of two years old, the best of its kind and without blemish. The furnace is called in Chinese *liau-lu*, "furnace of the fire-sacrifice."

At 4.45 A. M. the emperor on the occasion of the sacrifice puts on his sacrificial robes and goes to the south gate of the outer wall which encircles the south altar. He dismounts from his *nien*, as the imperial sedan is called, and walks to the yellow tent on the second terrace of the altar. He has mounted the altar on the south side, first ascending nine marble steps and then walking across the first terrace. He mounts nine more marble steps to the yellow tent. Leaving the yellow tent there are nine more steps to the upper terrace. He advances to the north and kneels on the central round stone. Just at this moment the fire of the burnt sacrifice

<sup>1</sup> By J. E. in the *China Review*.

is kindled "to meet the spirit of Shang-ti (God)" as the language is. The emperor then proceeds to burn incense to Shang-ti and



THE NORTH ALTAR OF THE TEMPLE OF HEAVEN. (From R. K. Douglas's *Society in China*.)

to each of his ancestors, whose tablets are arranged in wooden huts on the northeast and northwest portions of the altar.

The altar on this upper terrace where the offerings are arranged

before the tablets is ninety feet wide: He kneels before Shang-ti and burns incense to his ancestors, and while he kneels three times and makes nine prostrations, bundles of silk, jade cups, and other gifts are presented, and the musicians play the ancient melody called *King-ping-chi-chang*.

When the Jewish high priest entered the holy place he bore the names of the children of Israel on the breast-plate on his heart. The breast-plate is the *pu-kwa* of the Chinese, a square embroidered cloth worn over the heart with emblematic figures upon it. The archæological connexion of the *pu-kwa* with the breast-plate cannot be questioned by any reasonable critic. But the Chinese idea of the high priest unites royalty with priesthood, and belongs to the patriarchal age rather than to the specially Mosaic institutions.

The *brazen altar* was in the wilderness placed in the court in front of the tabernacle. It is also called in Scripture the altar of burnt offering. Dr. E. P. Barrows in his *Biblical Geography and Antiquities*, p. 507, London edition, says it was "a hollow frame of acacia wood, five cubits square and three cubits high, with horns at the four altars." The Chinese altar of burnt offering is, I believe, a cube in shape and nine feet each way. It is therefore much larger than the Hebrew altar. It is built of hewn stones, is faced with green bricks and is ascended by steps. Thus disagreeing from the Mosaic requirements it<sup>1</sup> belongs altogether to the præ-Mosaic religion of the world. The account in Exodus xxvii. 4, 5, says, "Thou shalt make for it a grating of net-work of brass, and upon the net shalt thou make four brazen rings in the four corners thereof, and thou shalt put it under the ledge round the altar beneath, that the net may reach half way up the altar." Dr. Barrows continues: "Some have supposed that this grate of net-work was placed within the altar as a receptacle for the wood of the sacrifice. But in this case it could not well have been sunk half way down, and besides it contained the rings for the staves by which the altar was borne, a decisive proof that it was without the altar. Of those who adopt this latter view some, as Jonathan in his Targum, make the grate horizontal."

No rings are needed for a fixed altar, because it is not intended to be carried. The servants whose duty it is to carry the slain bullock from the slaughter-house on the east side of the altar at some distance, convey it by means of shoulder poles. Judging by the size of the Chinese altar the bearers and their fellow-servants would mount the altar by the east, west, and south steps at the

<sup>1</sup> Ex., xx. 25.

same time, and lay the animal down on the iron grate in the manner seen at a funeral when, in perfect order and decorous silence, the bearers let down the coffin into a newly-opened tomb. The officers having charge of this duty wait for the emperor. When he kneels they can see him do so on the northwest in the center of the high altar. They give the signal, and the fire is kindled by the door on the north side just below the grating. There seems no reason then why we should not explain the grate mentioned in Exodus as corresponding to the Chinese grate in the Altar of Heaven.

The Mosaic net-work was probably inside and outside of the altar. In Peking it is only inside. This suits the meaning of the biblical word "beneath." The brass or copper used was produced in Arabia Petraea. In China iron is much more abundant than copper, and consequently iron has always been employed. Iron is mentioned in that part of the *Book of History* which belongs to the Hia dynasty, B. C. 2000. The sole use of the grate is to hold the victim in the burnt sacrifice and afford free passage for heat and draught. The grating of Exodus was not only so used but was also employed outside for ornament and possibly as a support for the feet and hands of the Levites ministering at the altar. The place of the grate was half way up the altar, both within and without.