

“ORIENTALISM.”

BY THE EDITOR.

WHY do we delve into the past and pay so much attention to events and developments that have long since passed away from the earth. Why do we fill many of our columns with explanations of conditions and institutions that have long since ceased to exist or prevail in distant countries? It is simply and solely to throw light upon the problems of the present time and to help us find the right solution of our own difficulties. And why do we introduce into our columns so much of Orientalism, expositions of the results of Biblical research, the rise of Babylonian civilisation, the beliefs of the Egyptians, the philosophy of Brahmanism, the psychology and ethics of Buddhism, and the strange notions of China? It is solely for the purpose of letting us understand our own religious faith, its institutions and ideals. Only by studying the views of others and by comparing them to ours, do we learn to distinguish the essential from the accidental. Comparative religion holds the key to a comprehension of any single religion. There is no probability of attaining a just and judicial judgment of our own beliefs unless we have a thorough knowledge of kindred faiths, and our knowledge of others ought not to remain on the outside, ought not to be a superficial enumeration of externalities, but ought to go to the core of religious aspirations and ought to see the living force that quickens their inmost life.

If we publish so much on Orientalism it is simply because the Orient plays an important part in the history of religion. *Ex oriente lux* is an old famous phrase which states the truth that our civilisation and religion came from the East and have travelled with the sun. If the Orient, as it is now, lies in a state of lethargy and is no longer a living center of an intellectual life, we must bear in mind that the roots of our civilisation lie buried there and we can under-

stand ourselves only when tracing our history back to its beginning.

While the history of Hither Asia, the Bible land, so called, is of importance because its history is closely connected with the history of Christianity, we find a study of India fruitful on account of the parallel development which suggests comparison, and China is in many respects even more interesting because many conditions are so radically different.

China, in addition, possesses another peculiar attraction which is not so much a problem of the past as of the future. Western civilisation in its constant expansion has taken possession of five continents. It not only retains Europe, but it has found a new home in both Americas. It has settled Australia and sways the fate of Africa. In its spread over the world it has finally invaded Asia. Siberia is in Russian hands. Hither India is British, and Further India is practically divided between the English and the French. The Aryan race is now coming into contact with China and we are for the first time aware that we are here confronted with an old, respectable, albeit stagnant civilisation which will not so easily be assimilated as others, and the inhabitants are both industrious and docile; hence the yellow race might refuse to be swallowed up and might even in its turn exercise an influence upon the white man's civilisation—a very unpleasant prospect for all those who believe that their own souls alone have been anointed by the grace of God,—a prospect which has been called “the yellow peril.” If we were just we would grant that the white peril to the yellow race is much greater than the “yellow peril” to the white race.

The situation is always critical when two civilisations meet.

It will not be easy to leaven the dough of the Chinese nation, yet the first condition of dealing properly with the Chinese problem will be to be familiar with their characteristic peculiarities.

For all these reasons, the discussions of Biblical and other Oriental, as well as Chinese, topics are not mere fads or digressions into investigations of useless and unnecessary topics, interesting only to specialists, but the themes of the articles published in *The Open Court* are of decidedly practical importance, and if we do not always point out the direct lessons that can be derived from them, it is because it would be too tedious for our readers to state the same truths again and again. Moreover, we think that we can fairly well leave it to them to make their own applications and draw their own inferences. We believe in truth. We believe in the necessity of searching for the truth and in the possibility of finding it. We believe in science; we believe in evolution, and we trust that the laws that

guide mankind are everywhere the same. All men are everywhere confronted with the same problems and they try to solve them by similar methods. We have the same instincts and even the successful phases of our mental growth are everywhere analogous, tending constantly upward and onward. The heart of man is at bottom the same everywhere. There are sages and heroes in every country. There are high-spirited teachers, and at the same time there are powers of evil at work that darken the light and impede the way of progress.

Though we may be the strongest race and be in possession of the most accurate methods of science and also be blessed with the most liberal institutions, religious as well as political, we ought to recognise that other and weaker nations are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. They are our brothers and their social, political and religious life has developed according to the same laws and is bringing forth similar blossoms and similar fruits, and in spite of our boasted superiority we may still learn from them in many details and if we want to teach them, we must not be too proud first to know them and appreciate the good qualities they have.