

A JAPANESE AUTHOR ON THE CHINESE NESTORIAN MONUMENT.

BY FRITS HOLM.

[It may be remembered from this magazine's January, 1909, issue that in 1907-8, the Danish author of this paper, Dr. Holm, commanded an expedition to Sian-fu, which succeeded after many hardships and great expense (more than \$14,000) to make and transport to New York a two-ton, ten-foot replica, carved out of the same kind of limestone as the original, of the Chinese Nestorian monument of A. D. 781, excavated accidentally in A. D. 1625. For his work Dr. Holm has been distinguished by over thirty governments, universities and learned societies, and the present pope recently conferred upon him the highest decoration ever bestowed by the Vatican on a non-Catholic in this country. Dr. Holm's replica of the *Chungchiaopci* was on exhibition, as a loan, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from June 1908 until June 1916, when it was purchased by Mrs. George Leary, it being as yet undecided where its permanent home is to be. Meanwhile, besides lecturing and writing about the monument, Dr. Holm, although not a man of means, has managed to present to six governments (Denmark, Spain, Greece, Venezuela, Mexico and the Holy See) full-size reproductions in colored plaster of the flawless replica, while he allowed Yale University, in 1910, to purchase a seventh cast at cost. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Nestorian monument has, so to speak, come into its own during the past eight years since Dr. Holm undertook his hazardous mission, whose results he is so energetically and disinterestedly pursuing; and, in this connection, it is singularly pleasant to contemplate the arrival of a new volume, by a Japanese savant, concerning the famous tablet.

People interested in the subject who may wish to communicate with Dr. Holm, can reach him at 14 John Street, New York City.—Ed.]

NOT only the orientalist, but the general reader, will feel under an obligation to Prof. P. Y. Saeki, a valued member of the faculty of Waseda University, at Tokyo, for his most interesting and stimulating book entitled *The Nestorian Monument in China*.¹

Professor Saeki's work is illustrated and contains a few introductory lines by the Rev. Canon Lord William Gascoyne-Cecil, author of *Changing China*, and a younger brother of the Marquess of Salisbury who generously guaranteed the outlay caused by the

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publication of Professor Saeki's book; a brief preface by that great Oxford assyriologist, the Rev. Prof. A. H. Sayce; another preface and an introduction of 165 pages by the author; his new translation of the "luminous" inscription; and extensive notes on the text.

One important point, upon which Professor Saeki insists, is that we should not translate *ching* by "illustrious"—Nestorianism having for so long been termed "the illustrious religion"—but "luminous."



THE ROOFS OF SIAN-FU.

In the beginning of his long and interesting introduction, which to many, no doubt, will form the most fascinating part of the book, Professor Saeki describes Sian-fu, the provincial capital of Shensi, and informs us that Kioto in Japan was laid out after the model of Changnan, the name of Sian-fu when that wonderful center was the Tang emperors' capital, and when Christianity was first brought to China in A. D. 635. At that time Sian-fu, the author states, had 25 inner and outer gates, but in 1907 I found but four, though they were impressive enough.

Leaving behind all such data, more or less well known, Pro-

fessor Saeki's book becomes distinctly alluring, if not almost sensational, when on page 48 he starts discussing the never fully explained fate of the millions of Chinese Nestorian Christians, saying "and we are glad to announce that we have discovered some remnants of the Assyrian Christians in China."

There is little doubt that Professor Saeki's learned theory pos-



PAGODA OF THE TANG DYNASTY (618-906) NEAR SIAN-FU.

sesses a great many winning points, and, in brief, they are the following:

It will be remembered by students of the Nestorian inscription, that this historical document itself clearly states that it was "written by Lü Hsiu-Yen, Assistant Secretary of State and Superintendent of the Civil Engineering Bureau of Taichou." While all former translators of the inscription have endowed Lü Hsiu-Yen with a

military title, Professor Saeki disputes the correctness thereof, making it clear that Lü was decidedly a civil mandarin. He furthermore points out that Lü, at the time he "penned" the inscription, according to native experts on Tang calligraphy, must have been



THREE MOHAMMEDAN SERVANTS AT SIAN-FU.

quite a young man, since the calligraphy employed is, indeed, that of a youth.

Now, it so happens, that one of the foremost Chinese "secret societies" of yore and of to-day is the Chin-Tan Chiao, meaning the "Religion of the Pill of Immortality." It was founded by one Lü Yen, who was born in Shansi A. D. 755.

In A. D. 781, when the Nestorian monument was erected, or rather in A. D. 780 when the inscription was chiselled, Lü Yen, of great fame as poet and calligrapher, was a young man twenty-five years of age, who had lived the life of a student surrounded in Shansi and Shensi by Nestorian converts, high and low; and Professor Saeki asserts, with no inconsiderable force of conviction, that Lü Yen is no other person than our Lü Hsiu-Yen of the inscription.

That the middle part of the name, represented by Hsiu, should have disappeared during the centuries, Professor Saeki considers not very exceptional, citing other cases of similar nature.

If, therefore, Professor Saeki is correct in his attractive assumption that Lü Yen of everlasting fame, founder of the Secret Society of the Pill of Immortality, is identical with Lü Hsiu-Yen of the Nestorian inscription, then it is fairly easy to follow our learned author another step into the enticing realm of reconstruction. We must admit that a great many of the teachings of to-day of the afore-mentioned society, the Chin-Tan Chiao, are similar to those of the Syrian church, and that consequently its millions of members, of whom some fifteen thousand were slain in 1891, members who are found mostly in northern and northwestern China where the Nestorian converts used to reside, are the logical descendants of that Christian community at Sian-fu which set up the Chingchiaopei in A. D. 781. It is probable that the founder of the Chin-Tan Chiao himself played an important part in the creation of the tablet as the youthful calligrapher who assisted the Persian prelate Adam, or Ching-Tsing, the "luminously purified" pope of China, our learned composer of the text on the monument.

May the merit of identifying Lü Hsiu-Yen with Lü Yen forever remain one of the most treasured possessions of Professor Saeki!

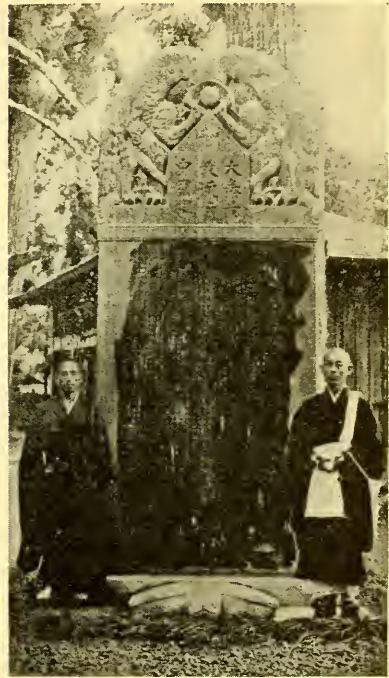
It is, of course, a great pity that Professor Saeki, like the late Father Henri Havrêt, S. J., of Shanghai, who wrote a magnificent treatise on the monument in three volumes, has never as yet had time or opportunity to visit Sian-fu and inspect the Nestorian stone. In fact, I fear that Professor Saeki has before his mind's eye quite an inexact picture of the old stela, because, while he has seen neither the original, nor the replica in New York, he is evidently acquainted with the "second replica" of the monument which Mrs. E. A. Gordon caused to be placed in 1911 on Mount Koya in Japan. Undeniably Mrs. Gordon was actuated by the noblest and most generous of motives. But however great the care exercised may have been, it must be conceded that the "replica" on Koya San

is indeed not a *replica* of the Nestorian monument, nor a facsimile, nor a reproduction, nor a copy of any kind whatsoever.

It is true that the interpretation of the word "replica" has been slightly broadened in the latest editions of both the Webster and Standard Dictionaries, but only slightly. A replica of a monument surely must possess its accurate dimensions. And Professor Saeki, enthusiastic about Mrs. Gordon's enterprise, tells us about this "second replica" on the top of Mount Koya, that it "was dedicated—,



THE ORIGINAL MONUMENT.
June 1907. Photo by the author.



THE MT. KOYA REPLICA.
Jan. 1912. From *Chinese Recorder*.

on October 3, 1911, and is an exact copy of the original stone" (*italics are mine*).

A glance at the accompanying two photographs, one of which is a hitherto unpublished photograph of the original monument which I took in June 1907 outside the western suburban gate of Sian-fu and the other a picture of the Mount Koya "replica," is enough to convince even the most casual observer that Mrs. Gordon's workmen had very unusual ideas of accuracy as to dimen-

sions and as to the way in which the six dragons at the top should be reproduced, which apparently must have been done from sketches or blurred photographs. Their success in creating this "second replica," therefore, can hardly be characterized as being more than moderate.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that the inscription itself on the Japanese stela is entirely faultless, especially if rubbings (*décalques*) of the original text were employed in chiselling the inscription. Photographs indeed would never suffice.

My illustration of the "replica" in Japan has been rephotographed from *The Chinese Recorder*, Shanghai, January, 1912, whose editor was not willing to publish some information which I sent him at that time concerning the deplorable lack of accuracy that makes Mrs. Gordon's gift such a questionable addition to the world of eastern archeology.

But while I sincerely regret that Japan does not possess, in spite of Mrs. Gordon's generosity, anything more than a large slab of stone looking somewhat like a Chinese memorial monument and giving the Nestorian inscription, it is only proper that I should be permitted to point this out, inasmuch as Professor Saeki, no doubt in excellent faith, informs us that the stone *is an exact copy of the original*, and that the reason for putting up the intended replica of the Chingchiaopei on Koya San, the noted Japanese Buddhist stronghold, was one of reverence to the sacred memory of the famous teacher Kobo Daishi (A. D. 774-835). This great traveler is supposed to have seen, during his years of wandering in China, the original Nestorian monument near Sian-fu, when he visited Shensi, where he studied the teachings of the Syrian church and extracted those things that he felt would be of value to those who sat at his feet at home to be taught. Professor Saeki tells us how thousands upon thousands of Japanese pilgrims to Mount Koya will behold this "replica," so it is to be deeply regretted that it was not made with more care for accuracy of detail.

Personally, I am, on the other hand, profoundly grateful to find it mentioned by Professor Saeki that "in 1909, when Prof. Y. Okakura went to New York, he examined Mr. Holm's replica in the Central [*should have been Metropolitan*] Museum and found, to his satisfaction, that it was a very good replica indeed." But then it must be remembered that my replica had the advantage of being made by *Chinese* artists and stonemasons only a few yards from the original monument, prior to its removal on October 2, 1907, into the Peilin ("Stone Coppice") of Sian-fu where it still

stands well protected under the shelter of a roof. It was most gratifying to me, and to many friends when they learned about it, that my expeditions to Sian-fu had been instrumental in thus having the monument removed to a safe place, in which endeavor the *corps diplomatique* at Peking, and various missionary bodies, had hitherto, for over twenty years, unfortunately failed.



ROOM IN THE PEILIN WHERE THE NESTORIAN MONUMENT IS PERMANENTLY HOUSED.

Professor Saeki inserts a new stone into that elusive arch known as "The Mystery of Fu-lin," but it is not the keystone. Much has been written about the meaning of the two ideographs that make up the word *Fu-lin*, which name has been said to stand for anything from the township of Bethlehem to the entire Roman empire or the metropolis of Constantinople. Such learned men as

Friedrich Hirth, who read a most interesting paper on the subject before the International Congress of Orientalists at Copenhagen in August, 1908, Sir Henry Yule, Pauthier, K. Shiratori, and the indefatigable Edouard Chavannes, have theorized about Fu-lin, but they have never succeeded in agreeing upon a common solution.

It seems to be certain that the Ta-tsin of the inscription stands for Syria, or Palestine; and it is obvious from a number of sources, Chinese and foreign, quoted in various writings, that Ta-tsin and Fu-lin are practically one and the same country. In fact, Professor Saeki maintains "that we are quite safe in saying that Li-kan, Ta-chin and Fu-lin are names connected with lands where the Graeco-Roman civilization was grafted on Hebrew thought and culture. But in our Nestorian inscription, Syria, or at least part of Palestine, where Christ was born, was intended."

Professor Saeki's direct contribution to the question of Fu-lin is his pointing out, that the transliteration of the missionary Ephraim's name is undertaken by employing the two Chinese characters that stand for Fu-lin. Consequently, our authors says, Fu-lin is likely to be the "Country of Ephraim," or the land from where the missionaries originally came. But he also admits that we are hardly any nearer than we were before to finding out exactly where that land lay.

As to the new translation of the long and beautiful inscription on our monument, Professor Saeki's version, while different in parts from all other translations—as has, indeed been the case with every additional translation since the second quarter of the seventeenth century—, possesses the stimulating quality of having been painstakingly worked out by an *eastern* scholar. Inasmuch as Professor Saeki's knowledge of western languages and lore is amazing, any possible mistakes that may be found will not be in his English, and, therefore, it may be concluded with certainty that this new translation will start many a friendly controversy among those who are entitled to speak.

In concluding I may perhaps be allowed to repeat that the orientalist is not the only person who will be interested in Professor Saeki's scholarly work on one of the world's four or five foremost monuments. The general reader, indeed, will encounter inspiring vistas of the history of the easternmost empires, interwoven with those views of the history of western lands that he may still retain from school and college days; so no library, public or private, may be considered complete without a copy of *The Nestorian Monument in China*.