

YIN CHIH WEN,

A RELIGIOUS TRACT OF CATHAY.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE *Yin Chih Wen* is a religio-ethical tract, which, in spite of its popularity all over the Middle Kingdom, has not as yet, so far as we know, been translated into any Western language. Next to the *Kan-Ying P'ien* it is read and studied and taught both in schools and the home, and there is probably no family in China without it; but its contents are very little known in the Western world, and we have only once met with references to it by Professor Douglas in his *Confucianism and Taouism* under the title of "Book of Secret Blessings."*

It is difficult to translate the title of the book. All we can say is that the rendering by Douglas, "Book of Secret Blessings," does not recommend itself; but the truth is that an exact translation which would be as terse and as expressive as is the Chinese, appears to be all but impossible.

We have long been in doubt as to what English words would best express the term *Yin Chih*, and we have seriously considered the following three possibilities: "secret virtue," "heaven's quiet dispensation," and "mysterious workings." None of these versions would be incorrect, but they do not sufficiently express the full meaning of the term. The first and second express two meanings which ought to be combined into one such as is the third, in order to serve as an equivalent of this peculiar expression; and we have finally decided to render our title "The Tract of the Quiet Way," which, however, though it is sufficiently broad and brief, is not intelligible without further explanation.

The word *chih* is used both as verb and as noun. As a verb it means "to determine," "to raise"; as a noun it may be defined by

* Professor Douglas's book is one in the series of *Non-Christian Religious Systems* published by the Society for the Advancement of Christian Knowledge. His reference to the *Yin Chih Wen* is made on pp. 256 and 272.

"principle," "rule," "method," "dispensation," "way."* The word *yin* means "in secret," either in the sense of "unheeded" or "unostentatious." It also conveys the idea of anything possessed with a deeper meaning, anything mysterious; and the two words together, *yin chih*, denote the quiet way of Heaven, which works out the ends of divine dispensation, invisibly yet unflinchingly, to the awe and astonishment of every sapient observer, as says the Christian hymn:

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform."

If we had to translate these lines into Chinese, we might render the words "a mysterious way" very appropriately by *yin chih*.

It is an old maxim of the traditional wisdom of China which is most emphatically insisted upon by Lao Tze and all the sages of his school, that these quiet ways of Heaven should be imitated by man. As Heaven lets its sun shine upon good and evil, without discrimination and also without expecting reward or advantages; so man should do good to his fellows, perform acts of rectitude of justice and of mercy, show benevolence and kindness toward all in an impartial spirit without cherishing ulterior motives, without hope of reward, and without desire for praise. The man who thus imitates "Heaven's quiet way" in unostentatiously realizing the ideal of heavenly goodness is truly virtuous, and so *Yin Chih* has also come to denote a condition which may be characterized as, and translated by, "secret virtue," reminding us of Christ's injunction not to let our right hand know what the left hand is doing (Matt. vi. 1-4).

In the title of the book the words *Yin Chih* cover the general idea of the "secret ways" both as they are working in the divine dispensation and in human action, and if either meaning predominates we should say that it is certainly the former—the quiet ways of Heaven which determine the destiny of man and which are described by Shakespeare as

"A divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

—Hamlet, VI, 1-4.

The word *chih* occurs for the first time in Chinese literature

* The character is presumably phonetic. It consists of the radical "horse," which is modified by the symbol "to ascend," "to go up higher," the latter being a compound of "higher" and "to step up." In common language the word *chih* means "stallion," but we may be sure that this is an accidental homophony. A sameness of sound led to the use of the same character, an occurrence which is very frequent in the Chinese language.

in the "Great Plan" of the *Shu King*, and there it is used in the verbal sense "to regulate, to rule, to determine." The commentator of the *Yin Chih Wen* explains the title in the following words:

"In the "Great Plan," a chapter of the *Shu King*, we read: '*wei tien yin chih hsia min.*' [Only | Heaven | mysteriously | rules | below | the people] and a gloss explains the word *chih* by *ting*, 'to determine.'"

The quoted passage means that "Heaven alone, in a quiet or mysteriously unnoticeable way, directs the affairs of mankind living below on earth."

The commentator continues:

"The human soul is most intelligent and its essential nature is intrinsically good. All our moral relations and daily actions have their reasons why they should be so. When Heaven above created these beings it mysteriously endowed them with something to guide (*ting*) them, and this something appears when the people practice goodness. Indeed it is the guiding (*ting*) principle of creation that good men never lose an opportunity to do what is good. If you really practice it (i. e., the good) in your heart it is not necessary that others should know of it, for there is something in the unseen which fully regulates and determines (*ting*) your affairs. Those who deny this fact commit a secret (*yin*) sin (*o*) and their retribution will be speedy. Therefore this book is called *Yin Chih*."

The words *Yin Chih* ("the quiet way," or more explicitly, "the mysterious dispensation of Heaven showing itself in man's unostentatious virtue") are opposed to *yin o*, i. e., "the hidden evil in the bad man's heart." The word *o* (a compound of "crookedness" and "heart") is the common term for evil or badness. The contrast in which *yin chih* stands to *yin o* explains how far it would be proper to translate our title by "secret virtue."

Considering the fact that the word "way" in English is as broad as the meaning of *chih* in Chinese, and that the former is widely used with a deep religious significance, we have finally chosen as a translation of our title the term "the quiet way." We are fully conscious of the shortcomings of our rendering, but our readers will bear in mind the original sense and become accustomed to our translation by associating it with its right interpretation.

* * *

Our picture, a drawing by Shen Chin-Ching, represents Wen Ch'ang Ti Chün, one of the highest divinities of China, revealing

himself to the author of the tract. Wen Ch'ang is the name of the god, and Ti Chün his title.

Wen Chang means "scripture glory."

The word *wen* is the same character which occurs in the last word of the title of our book. It denotes writing in general, and is especially applied to short exhortations of a religious nature such as are commonly called in Western terminology "tracts."



LORD SCRIPTURE GLORY.

2433

Hence we translate "The Tract of the Quiet Way," not "the book," as Douglas has it. With reference to the god's name, we translate *wen* by "scripture," because in English the term scripture refers mainly to religious literature and is similar to the Chinese original in so far as it has a devotional ring.

Ch'ang means "glory" or "radiance," the character being composed of two suns, indicating an intensified brightness of light.

To characterize the god Wen Ch'ang or "scripture glory" as god of literature (as is sometimes done) is, to say the least, misleading. He is the god of learning in general, and in Chinese high schools a hall is dedicated to him as the patron saint of education, refinement, and especially moral instruction through religious books. *Belles lettres* form only one and in fact an insignificant branch of his department. He is, above all, the god of divine revelation through scripture.

The rank of Wen Ch'ang in the world of gods, is "Emperor" or "Ti," and the word Ti Chün, "the higher emperor," is commonly translated by "lord superior." It is a title which is also borne by the god of war, Kwang Ti, and if the latter is compared to the archangel Michael, the former, Wen Ch'ang, should be likened to Gabriel. In fact, we cannot deny that there is a strong probability of historical connection between these highest princes among the angels, for the conception of both may have been derived from Babylonian prototypes, Michael being represented by Marduk and Gabriel by Nebo.

Michael means literally "who is like God," and seems to designate that divine presence (viz. the ineffable name) which is believed to be equal to God; but in the classical period of Jewish monotheism the word Michael was explained not as a characterization of the archangel as being like God, but as expressing faith in monotheism, implying the proposition that there is no second to God. Michael, according to the angel lore of the Hebrews, is the representative of God, and so he is identified with God's cause. He is the guardian angel of Israel, the chosen people, and also commander-in-chief of the angelic hosts. As Marduk fought with Tiamat, so Michael wages war against the dragon (Rev. xii. 7).

Gabriel is as different in character from Michael as Wen Ch'ang is from Kwang Ti. Gabriel means "the man of God." He is deemed superior to all other angels except Michael and is generally represented as the angel of God's special revelation and the interpreter of God's intentions. Thus, it is Gabriel who explains Daniel's vision; nor can we doubt that the angel with an inkhorn by his side, mentioned in Ezekiel x. 2-3, was Gabriel, the scribe of God. Old Testament scholars have pointed out his resemblance to the Babylonian god Nebo, who in the monuments is depicted in human form with an inkhorn at his side, differently from the Cherubim (the human-headed winged bulls), which fact throws light on the vision of Ezekiel, alluded to above, and shows that there is a specific meaning in the name "man of God."

In the New Testament Gabriel continues to represent God's revelation. It is he who announces the birth of both John the Baptist and of Jesus. There is no figure in Christian tradition which would resemble more closely Wen Ch'ang than Gabriel.

As Kwang Ti, the god of war, was represented to have lived on earth as a man, so Wen Ch'ang, or "scripture glory," is said to have been an ancient Chinese sage, but little is known of the man to whom the Chinese traditions refer.

According to the commentator, "he lived during the Tang dynasty (620-950 A. D.), and his secular name was Chang-O. Yüeh was his native province, but later he moved to Tze Túng in the district of Shu. We are told that his personality was distinguished by nobility and piety. His writings were clear, luminous, and forcible. He began to exercise a moral power over the people, who unconsciously felt his spirituality. He entered for a while upon an official career, but, not satisfied with the course of politics, he resigned his government position and lived as a saintly recluse. The people of Shu showed great affection for him, and, when he died, built a temple in his honor calling it 'Temple of the Sage of Tze Túng.' People far and near came to offer prayers which were remarkably well responded to by the sage. Everybody, then, said, 'There is in the heavens a star called Wen Ch'ang; the sage [i. e., Chang-O] must have been its incarnation.'"

Our tract bears the name of the god Wen Ch'ang, and accordingly he is regarded as its author, or at least as the divinity who has guided the pen of the man who composed it; but (unless we assume that Chang-O was the author which is not positively impossible) the name of the scribe who made himself the mouthpiece of Wen Ch'ang and who, in human consideration ought to be regarded as its author, is not recorded.

* * *

The date of the *Yin Chih Wen* can only approximately be determined. It appears that it cannot be older than Chang-O and must not therefore be dated earlier than the time of the Tang dynasty. In the days of Kang-Hi, however, the pamphlet was not only well known, but commented upon and supplied with explanatory stories. Accordingly we cannot stray far from truth when we look upon the *Yin Chih Wen* as approximately simultaneous with the *Kan-Ying P'ien* which in many respects it greatly resembles, and so we would say that we should not set the date of its composition much later than about 1600 A. D.

Specialists of Chinese literature will probably be able to ascer-

tain the age of the *Yin Chih Wen* more accurately by pointing out quotations from it in other books whose date of composition is unquestionable.

The original *Yin Chih Wen* consists (1) of the tract itself which is here translated, (2) of glosses added by commentators, and finally (3) of a great many stories which are similar to the stories of the *Kan-Ying P'ien*, except that they are more rational and appear to avoid all reference to miracles and superstitious agencies. The book has apparently appealed more to the rationalistic Confucianists or *literati*, who, while upon the whole agnostic, exhibit at the same time due respect for the officially recognized religions.

* * *

We hope that the publication of this book will help Western readers to understand better the Chinese character and especially its undeniable fervor for moral ideals. Though the Chinese mind, especially among the uneducated classes, is filled with superstitious notions, we cannot help granting that the character of their moral maxims ranges very high; and we must confess that among all the nations of the world there is perhaps none other so seriously determined to live up to the highest standard of ethical culture.

An appreciation of the virtues of the Chinese will help Western people to treat them with more consideration, and so we contribute our interpretation of this treatise as a mite towards a better understanding between the East and the West, between the white races of Europe and America and the natives of Asia. We hope that the day will come when the mutual distrust will disappear, and when both in reciprocal appreciation of their natural good qualities, will be anxious to treat each other with fairness and brotherly kindness.

* * *

Our frontispiece is a picture of the great philosopher Lao Tze whom the Taoists call *T'ai Shang*, The Most Exalted One; or more fully *T'ai Shang Lao Chün*, i. e., The Most Exalted Ancient Master. The artist represents him with a little square cap usually worn by the common people and dressed, not in silk, but in rough woolen garments; for we know that he practised the simplicity which he preached. But, in contrast to this simple exterior, his countenance indicates a rare depth of thought and his eyes beam with benevolence. We have set above the picture a quotation from his great book, the *Tao-Ti'King* (Chapter 70) which reads:

Shang jan pei hö, hwai yü

"A saint wears wool, but in his bosom are jewels."