

BIBLE QUOTATIONS AND CHINESE CUSTOMS.

BY JULIUS J. PRICE.

SCHLEIERMACHER has well remarked that "no religion is wholly new, as the same basic ideas reappear in all."¹ And if one considers the universality of some practices² he might believe that it points to a time when the ancestors of all nations lived together and so derived the knowledge from a common source. But in spite of this fact, each religion tries to realize that only in its respective religious consciousness can the truth be possessed.³ On the other hand, if we examine the sacred books of the three great religions of the world, it becomes evident even to the most casual observer that there are common basic ideas in all of them. It is now an accepted fact, advanced by theologians, that Christianity borrowed largely not only from Judaism but also from the pagan cults with which it came in contact.⁴ Mohammedanism in its turn borrowed from both Judaism and Christianity. And so we could continue comparisons⁵ to show that no religion alone "is wholly new, as the same basic ideas reappear in all."

In the light of such facts it is not to be wondered at, then, that on comparing the sacred writings and customs of the Chinese with those of the Old and New Testament,⁶ a similitude of thought as well as of ideas becomes evident to the student.⁷ The following few examples will illustrate this contention.⁸

In Isaiah lvii. 6, we read, "Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion; they, they are thy lot; even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered a meat offering." The worship of smooth stones⁹ is attested by many ancient writers to

¹ Stade, *Akademische Reden*, etc., Giessen, 1899, p. 57.

² Comp., e. g., Lansdell, *The Tithe in Scripture*, p. 18.

³ Hegel's *Geschichte der Religion*, Vol. I, Chap. 5.

⁴ Conybeare, *Myth, Magic, Morals (passim)*.

⁵ Reinach, *Orpheus, a History of Religions (passim)*.

⁶ See Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

⁷ Baron von Hügel, *Mystical Elements of Religion*, Vol. I, Chap. 2.

⁸ Loisy, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 50.

⁹ Comp. Talmud: "R. Simon ben Yochai said, 'A precious stone was worn round the neck by our father Abraham, and every sick man who beheld it was restored to health. When our father Abraham died God suspended the stone from the sun.' Abbaye said, 'This accounts for the proverb, When the sun rises the illness decreases.'"—"Baba Bathra," 16B.

have been an outstanding feature in the character of heathen worship. Theophrastus well remarked that "passing by the anointed stones in the streets, the heathen takes out his vial of oil, pours it on them, and having fallen on his knees and made his admonition, he departs." Among the Semites¹⁰ there must have been a belief that a stone was the habitation of the deity. Herodotus¹¹ tells us that the Arab had great reverence for stones. He must worship every white and beautiful stone, and when it was impossible to find such, he was so crude as to worship a hill of sand. Before departing on a journey, the Arab would take with him four stones, three of which were to serve the purpose of a hearth, the fourth to be used as an idol. In cases where stones were not available, the Arab while on the road would worship any stones or heap of sand that he found in the neighborhood.¹² "The adoration of stones among the Ishmaelites," says Ibn Ishak, "originated in the custom of men carrying a stone from the sacred enclosure of Mecca; where they went they set it up and made circuits round about it as about the Kaaba, till at last they adored every goodly stone they saw, forgot their religion, and changed the faith of Abraham and Ishmael into the worship of stones." The Deuteronomic historian regarded the downfall of the people as due to the erecting of stones by Juda in Israel.

In China, a water-worn stone elevated upon a rude altar represented the *shayshu*, or gods of the land. Before this altar, incense sticks were constantly burned. Every village and every street of twenty-five families erected one of these altars, and in the spring and autumn worshiped the deities supposed to be enshrined upon it. These gods were held in particular veneration by the agricultural classes, who with the aid of the priests invoked a blessing upon the season at certain times, generally on the second of the second month. The priests, three or four in number, not loath to perform so joyous a ceremony, arrived dressed in robes of yellow and green, accompanied by a few musicians with their instruments. They were attended by their employers, and a servant bearing a tray filled with cakes, preserves, and meats proceeded them, followed by another carrying several small cups and a can of spirits. On approaching the altar the eatables were presented before the stones, and then the priests made a libation before and upon it of three cups of spirits.

¹⁰ Comp. Gen. xxviii; comp. also the Greek *bochutus*. The Phœnicians also worshiped stones in the temple of Melkart at Tyre, comp. Herod., II, 44.

¹¹ Comp. Herod., III, 8.

¹² Can this be a remnant of the Canaanites' custom against which the Deuteronomic Code was issued? Comp. Deut. xii. 3, also xvi. 22.

At the sound of a flourish upon a gong and trumpet, the priest mumbled over the prescribed form of blessing upon the neighboring fields, which was not understood by reason of its rapid enunciation. After the prayer, a second libation was sometimes poured out before the priest and attendants passed on to the next altar. During this ceremony, great glee was manifested by all spectators, caused no doubt by the seemingly good humor of the priest. The landlord, considering the expense incurred, did not show so jovial a countenance. One can almost imagine a similar custom to have existed in the days of Isaiah.

In Proverbs xxv. 3, we read as follows: "The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable." In comparing the following aphorism from the *Ming-sin Paou Keen*, we seem to find the very same thought. Here we read, "The fish dwell in the bottom of the water, and the eagles in the sides of heaven; the one though high may be reached by an arrow, and the other though deep may be angled for; but the heart of man at only a cubit's distance cannot be known. Heaven can be spanned, earth can be fathomed, but the heart of man cannot be measured."

In Eccl. vii. 6, we read, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot so is the laughter of the fool." The coarse grass which grows upon the hillsides in the islands about Macao is used by the poor Chinese as a substitute for wood, which is too expensive for cooking purposes. It consists for the most part of a species of *Andropogon*. The natives cut it in the autumn and store it in bundles for winter's use. In its unsubstantial nature it resembles the dry thorns used for fuel in Judea; and its crackling blaze and great flame and noise giving no heat in the burning or coals in the embers, reminds one of the laughter of a fool.

In Job xix. 23-24, we read, "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever!" Engraved rocks, to commemorate remarkable events, are seen in China, though not in such vast numbers as in Persia and India. This is explained by the fact that the literature of the Chinese obviates the necessity for such crude expressions of commendation. The smoothed surface of rocks in Asitu, when they lie in spots esteemed lucky, are engraved with characters under the direction of geomancers or *fung-shavuy* doctors. Characters of this order are supposed to exert a beneficial influence upon the surrounding country. Great skill is often displayed in the cutting of the sentences and names on the pillars and door-posts of the temples. These inscriptions are em-

ployed to commemorate distinguished and honored individuals, but often are merely used for ornament's sake. Just as the Romans anciently published their Twelve Tables, so the Chinese government also employed this mode of establishing laws and regulations. The characters are plainly and deeply engraven upon the marble, and the slab is set up in a conspicuous place, in such a manner as to shelter it from the destroying influence of climatic conditions.

If we turn to the New Testament and compare several of the customs alluded to therein, with those of the Chinese, we shall be able to find a very similitude between them and those of the early inhabitants of the Chinese Empire. The more we examine the old in a new illustration, the more we become aware of their exactitude.

In Matthew vi. 7, we read, "But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking." The following passage from the books of the Buddhists may show why such a caution had to be given by the writers of the New Testament as well as by later Chinese authorities. It is supposed to be a canon delivered by Fuh to be repeated for the prevention of all misfortunes and for the attaining of life in the world to come. The prayer is supposed to be repeated three times. It reads as I have it before me: "Nan-mo O-me-to po-yay, to-ta-kae to-yay, to-te-yay-ta, O-me-le-too po-kwan, O-me-le-to, seeh-tan-po-kwan, O-me-le-to, kwan-kca-lan-te, O-me-le-to, kwan-kea-lan-te: kea-me-ne, kea-kea-na, chih-to-kea-le po-po-ha."

This prayer is unintelligible to the average Chinaman. It is stated on very good authority that not one out of every hundred priests in China understands it. It is composed of bare sounds of Sanskrit words expressed as nearly as possible by Chinese words. The order of procedure with regard to this prayer was as follows: while the priest would repeat the prayer very quickly another priest would beat upon a drum in order to arouse the god. This drum was always made of wood inasmuch as it was a common belief that the evil spirit could not attack a drum made of wood. The above jumbled phrases were mumbled in a miserable fashion by the Chinese priest. Translated as well as possible, they mean: "The God Ometo (Amita) rests on top of the heads of those who repeat this prayer in order to save them from their enemies, to render them safe and comfortable in life, and to confer on them any mode of future existence which they may at the hour of death desire." I have been informed, if the prayer is recited thirty myriad times, the person reciting it can have anything he desires and will be sure to be at no distance from the personal vision of the god Ometo.

Later Chinese theologians as well as the author of the above-quoted New Testament verse began to condemn those who repeated their prayers innumera-ly.

But to proceed. In Matthew xx. 3, we read, "And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place." If one was to pass through the streets of Peking or Canton, one would be impressed with the crowds of porters or coolies waiting at the most public corners in the hope of a day's labor, or of being hired for a week or more. Each individual or couple is provided with a carrying pole and a pair of rope slings; and with these they perform all the services which fall to their lot. They are divided into companies and claim to do all the portage in their districts. In such towns where the coolies are hired by the month, these men often stand idle the lifelong day, through want of employment.

In Mark vii. 11, we read, "But ye say, if a man shall say to his father or mother, it is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free." In China, it is the custom for Buddhist priests to take an entire farewell of the parents or other relations, or as they express it, *chuh kea*, "to go out of the family," and separate themselves from the world. They no longer owe any duty to their parents, and according to their doctrine, "have aught to do for their father or mother." But this tenet is as directly opposed to the ethics of Confucius as to the Fifth Commandment, and is consequently practised by none other than the devotees of Buddha. It is among the Buddhists as it was among the Pharisees, an unnatural doctrine of the sect.

In Luke vi. 38, we read, "Good measure, pressed down and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." The Chinese, Japanese, and Loochooan costume consists of a number of long robes similar to nightgowns, which overlap in front and are secured by a girdle at the waist. One of the gowns is fashioned and used extensively to carry articles. These capacious receptacles often hold writing-materials, tobacco, pipe, and pouch, and numerous other commodities, without inconveniencing the wearer. The ancient Greeks and Hebrews were also accustomed to carrying articles in this manner. And it is the marvel of the careful observer that they were able to appear so well in such comely garments.

In John ii. 14, we read, "...and the changers of money sitting." The practice referred to here, of persons keeping small tables where money can be changed, is more common in China, perhaps, than in any of the several Asiatic countries where it is

in vogue. Those who engage in this profession usually provide themselves with a small table about three feet long by fifteen inches wide, and establish it in any busy thoroughfare. The market, temple, and street corner prove their particular haunts, and the garrulousness of the money-lender adds to the general confusion of the street noises. The strings of copper cash, often secured to the table by a chain, are piled up on one side, and the silver together with the small ivory yard with which it is weighed is kept in drawers. Their sign is a wooden figure carved in the form of a cylinder to represent a string of cash.

THE COSMOS AND ITS MEANING.

BY FRANK R. WHITZEL.

[In the following article, Mr. Whitzel offers a philosophic interpretation of the tenets of the Psychical Research Society. While fundamentally disagreeing with him on the subject, *The Open Court* presents his paper as an able statement of what some regard as the only escape from intellectual and moral despair.—Ed.]

NO one can avoid holding some idea, clear or hazy, in regard to the mechanism and the general purpose of the universe. Since the dawn of study explanatory theories ranging from crudest anthropomorphism to purest subjectivism have been advanced and, as knowledge increased, discarded or modified; but inherent weaknesses still render doubtful every possible hypothesis. The problem has been approached through three principal channels, philosophy, revelation, and science.

Philosophy.

Ancient philosophy, beginning with high confidence, was in the end unable to answer the skeptics, who denied that anything could be really proven since all our faculties were liable to error; hence, it was constrained to admit that the universe might possibly be but a mental illusion. In modern philosophy the system known as idealism, perceiving that nothing can be known save as it presents itself to consciousness, asserts that physical nature is the expression of thought, necessarily of a divine thought. Realism, more prosaic, assumes external nature to be a fact and also accepts the fundamental data of science, but it is compelled to do both practically on faith since they constitute an objective reality outside of consciousness. Pragmatism, a species of realism now in vogue, argues that,