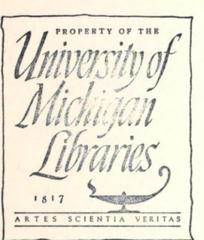
B 646031

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN


PROPERTY OF THE
University of Michigan Libraries
1817
ARTES SCIENTIA VERITAS

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

DS
721
K46

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

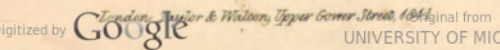
道光

Reason's Glory.

THE PRESENT EMPEROR OF CHINA.

Printed in Colours by C. Hullmandel

London, Taylor & Walton, Upper Gower Street, 1841.


Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

UNIV. OF MICH.

CHINA,

OR,

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE SYMBOLS, PHILOSOPHY, ANTIQUITIES, CUSTOMS, SUPERSTITIONS, LAWS, GOVERNMENT, EDUCATION, AND LITERATURE

OF

THE CHINESE.

DERIVED FROM ORIGINAL SOURCES, AND ACCOMPANIED WITH DRAWINGS FROM NATIVE WORKS.

BY SAMUEL KIDD,

PROFESSOR OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR TAYLOR & WALTON,
BOOKSELLERS AND PUBLISHERS TO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
UPPER GOWER STREET.

1841.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Printed by J. L. Cox and Sons, 75, Great Queen Street,
Lincoln's-Inn Fields.

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Ry. M
5 · 1 5 · 43
48403

PREFACE.

The author feels that, in contributing to augment the number of works on China, some explanation may be required of the principle by which he has been guided. He is aware several valuable treatises exist in the English language on topics purely Chinese; but having attentively considered the object and modes of illustration pursued by their respective writers, the nomenclature of whose subjects may be in some respects similar to his, he frankly avows that the method he prescribed to himself some time ago has not been anticipated by any previous publication.

The specific object of the volume is to excite an interest on behalf of the Chinese, in those who are seeking comparatively unexplored fields of research, where they may acquire extended views of man, in his moral and intellectual state, in his social connections, and in relation to the Supreme Power from which he believes himself to have emanated.

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The peculiar circumstances which surround a Chinese from his birth, and continue to form his character in advancing to maturity, point him out as a suitable specimen of one of the wide extremes to which members of the same great family may diverge, through the modifying influence of educational habits, irrespective of Christian principle.

A European, introduced to one of the more powerful nations of the East, and sufficiently interested in it to investigate the mental and moral characteristics by which it is distinguished, must first apply himself to the language, not only as the best means of opening original sources of knowledge, but as the surest method of conducting his literary researches among the people to correct conclusions; because, while it is by studying modes of speech in Europe that distinct traits of national character are fully developed, so a knowledge of the language of an oriental nation—especially that of China—is still more essential to the development of its peculiar characteristics.

The writer having for several years been conversant with the Chinese, among whom, through the medium of their best authors and native expositors, he learned their language, national literature, and customs, though no longer animated with the hope of usefulness that first directed his studies, still preserves those impressions of interest which tended

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

so powerfully to subserve his higher aims. These strongly urge him to recommend for more extended study what many foreign Chinese scholars, with himself, would designate the power and elegance of the *symbolic system*. For, however noble any object, philanthropic or scientific, may be in itself, its attainment is greatly facilitated, when the means by which it is to be secured are agreeable to the tastes and sympathies of its promoters.

Being favoured with access to Chinese works belonging to the Morrison Library in University College, the writer has endeavoured to render his previous acquisitions, combined with appropriate illustrations from native authors, subservient to the elucidation of the several subjects discussed in this volume; with what success others must determine.

The work was designed as well for the general reader as the student of Chinese; and, therefore, both in the philological and other parts, it has been the author's care to avoid mere technical phraseology, and to convey Chinese thoughts to the English mind through a plain, intelligible medium. The symbolic system especially favours such design, since it appeals to the mind, through expressive pictorial images, and altogether dispenses with the cumbrous illustrations of alphabetic etymology, where numerous sounds, frequently ungrateful to the ear, without conveying ideas to the mind, are adduced in proof of

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the genealogy of a word, which, whatever may be its hidden qualities, has certainly no external attraction comparable to that of a pictorial symbol.

The author commits this work to the candid consideration of his enlightened countrymen, as a means of exciting attention to the important topics which it embraces, for the two-fold purpose of extending Chinese literature in England, and promoting English literature, both sacred and secular, in China.

For the portrait of the Emperor of China at the beginning of the volume, the author is indebted to the kindness of Mrs. Morrison, who favoured him with the loan of an original Chinese drawing, from which it is taken.

Camden Town,
June 23rd, 1841.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CONTENTS.

SECTION I.

ORIGIN AND GENIUS OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE—OBJECTIONS TO ITS IDEOGRAPHIC NATURE OBVIATED BY DEDUCTIONS FROM FACTS—SENSE, NOT SOUND, THE SPECIFIC OBJECT OF CHINESE WRITING—SIMILARITY BETWEEN CERTAIN EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS AND SOME CHINESE SYMBOLS. *Page* 1—98.

SECTION II.

A SKETCH OF THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF CHINA—CHARACTER OF HER FIRST SOVEREIGNS—RECORDS OF THE DELUGE—LAWS, ANTIQUITIES, AND CUSTOMS OF HER EARLIEST INHABITANTS. *Page* 99—134.

SECTION III.

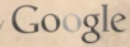
THE THREE SECTS—SENTIMENTS ON THE FIRST CAUSE—NATURE OF THEIR DIFFERENT SYSTEMS—PRACTICAL INFLUENCE. *Page* 135—189.

SECTION IV.

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHINESE—THEIR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, COMPRISING THE MEANS BY WHICH ITS AUTHORITY IS UPHELD AND CARRIED INTO EXECUTION. *Page* 190—209.

SECTION V.

POLITICAL STATE OF THE CHINESE—ANCIENT DYNASTIES—TARTAR CONQUEST—IMPERIAL FAMILY—PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS—SUPREME TRIBUNALS—DIFFERENT DEGREES OF NOBILITY. *Page* 210—262.



Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SECTION VI.

SUPERNATURAL ANIMALS—ANTIQUITIES—SACRED AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS—CIVIL AND POLITICAL INSIGNIA—INTERCOURSE WITH DISEMBODIED SPIRITS—SUPERSTITIOUS PREJUDICES—PERIODICAL FEASTS—DIVINATION—MARRIAGE. *Page* 263—334.

SECTION VII.

EDUCATION—LITERATURE—MEDICINE—BOTANY—NATURAL HISTORY—CONCLUDING REMARKS. *Page* 335—403.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLATES,

WHICH ARE ALL COPIED FROM CHINESE WORKS.

I. Ancient imperial carriage, copied from a drawing in the Shoo-king .... *opposite page* 114

II. No. 1. An ancient altar, ascended by steps. 2. A skin garment anciently worn by priests when offering sacrifices .... *opposite page* 242

III. Instruments of war. No. 1. Bow. 2. Arrow. 3. Helmet. 4. Spear. 5. Lance. 6. Shield. 7. Banner. 8. Battle-axe .... *opposite page* 246

IV. No. 1. Military drum. 2. Imperial standard. 3. Banner waved to direct military movements in battle. 4. Shield. 5. Sonorous stones .... *opposite page* 248

V. No. 1. Sceptre of the earliest Chinese dynasties. 2. Sceptre of the Tang dynasty. 3. Sceptre said to have been employed at the Deluge .... *opposite page* 268

VI. No. 1. Ancient duck vessel used at feasts as an emblem of temperance. 2. Ancient bell used to convoke assemblies of the people .... *opposite page* 270

VII. No. 1. Ancient vase. 2. Ancient basket. 3. Sacrificial cup made from the head of the victim offered in sacrifice .... *opposite page* 270

VIII. No. 1. A lamp made to resemble the lotus flower. 2. Musical Instrument...................... *opposite page* 276

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

IX. No. 1. Defective ring, a token by which official connection with the imperial government is dissolved. 2. Ancient sash, made of connected rings......... *opposite page* 278

X. No. 1. National seal of the Han dynasty. 2. National seal of the Tsin dynasty .... *opposite page* 280

XI. Ancient medal .... *opposite page* 282

XII. No. 1. Ancient imperial linen crown. 2. Imperial cap of the Han dynasty .... *opposite page* 284

XIII. No. 1. Imperial state cap adorned with 288 gems. 2. Ancient imperial apron .... *opposite page* 284

XIV. Nos. 1, 2. Chinese castanets. 3. Ancient cup, made of the horn of the unicorn—sent by his majesty to officers of government present at public feasts, as a token of his displeasure to be followed by immediate punishment...................................... *opposite page* 272

ERRATA.

At page 137, line 13, *for* " Osis," *read* " Isis."

— 268, last line of note, *for* " ‡ See Plates Nos. 1, 2," *read* " ‡ See Plate V. Fig. 1, 2." And at same page and line, *for* " ‖ See Plate No. 3," *read* " ‖ See Plate V. Fig. 3."

At page 269, second line of note from bottom, *for* " * See Plate No. 4," *read* " * See Plate II. Fig. 1."

At page 271, last line of note, *insert* " See Plate VI. Fig. 1."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHINA.

SECTION I.

ORIGIN AND GENIUS OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE—OBJECTIONS TO ITS IDEOGRAPHIC NATURE OBVIATED BY DEDUCTIONS FROM FACTS—SENSE, NOT SOUND, THE SPECIFIC OBJECT OF CHINESE WRITING—SIMILARITY BETWEEN CERTAIN EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS AND SOME CHINESE SYMBOLS.

Although various treatises on the history and character of the Chinese language have been published by scholars of considerable reputation, still there are points, peculiarly interesting both to the philosopher and the philologist, which require to be elucidated by an accurate investigation of facts and sound analogical reasoning. Having stated my views of the elementary and grammatical properties of this ancient tongue, in a lecture,* introductory to the Chinese course at University College, it will not be necessary to discuss them in this essay, especially as my present object embraces matter somewhat different in its nature, and capable of more extended

* See "Lecture on the Nature and Structure of the Chinese Language," by the Author.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

application. The method I propose to adopt proceeds on the assumption that the study of symbolical language has hitherto been little cultivated, simply because its characteristic distinctions have not been well understood, and that the frequent failure of attempts to combine its elements into a rational and consistent system has resulted from ignorance of its modes and uses in practical detail. In alphabetical languages, the written medium, composed of single letters, consists of the same elementary principles as the oral; but it is otherwise in symbolical tongues, whose characters are purely ideographic, and therefore do not necessarily constitute a system of phonetic signs.

In tracing a language so ancient as the Chinese to its source, the interesting inquiries naturally arise—what relation may it be supposed to have borne to any of the primitive modes of speech? — how long did the primeval tongue exist? — has it, in any modified form, survived the introduction of other languages into the world? — were all previous sounds lost in the confusion of tongues at Babel, and entirely new ones created; or, were various and contrary ideas grafted, by supernatural interposition, on words already familiar? From the description of man's first condition, in sacred history, speech, as a medium of communicating thought, must have preceded writing; but whether the mode of representing ideas through the medium of the eye was suggested by Divine inspiration, or it derived its origin from human resources, cannot now be ascertained. It is probable that intelligible sounds were used, in the infancy of the world, not only as names of living creatures and designations of material substances, but also to denote some inherent

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

quality, perceptible to the outward senses, or some peculiar circumstance, by which each genus was distinguished; like many words now current in the Hebrew, Chinese, and other Oriental languages. It may not be practicable to determine whether similar properties in different objects originated words nearly alike, except perhaps in their terminating or initial sound; yet it must be admitted that ideas not only generated phonetic signs in all languages, but also all the different sounds which subsist in the same language, especially where, like the Chinese, it is unique, and unencumbered with foreign importations. Man, as a thinking being, endowed with the power of speech, for the purpose of enabling him to express his thoughts, would not ordinarily invent new words, except to convey additional ideas; nor would he long defer the attempt to supply some medium of intercourse as a substitute for the oral, after the human family had begun to separate into distinct groups on distant parts of the earth. What method, then, would seem to be the most obvious and rational? On any system, difficulties must have occurred to those who first sought to communicate abstract notions; since, so far as we know, words descriptive of material substances and sensible objects were the only practicable medium; though it is not beyond probability that the "inspiration of the Almighty" might supernaturally endue man with wisdom to express sensations and reflections suggested by natural scenes and daily occurrences.

The first abstract conception uttered by a human being, so far as we are informed, was the sensation of fear, excited through the aural organ, and confessed by Adam to his Creator, in the following manner: "I heard thy

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

voice, and I was afraid." The emotion was strange; and, therefore, required some audible medium of development, inapplicable to existing objects or past circumstances: still, from his ability instantly to reveal that hitherto unknown impression, our first parent could most probably give instinctive utterance to any class of feelings or sentiments of which he might become the subject, though only possessed of a vocabulary strictly limited to his immediate necessities. But whether ideas ever arose in his mind to which he could not affix a definite sign, phonetic or graphic, is a question which cannot be fully solved, so long as it shall remain undetermined whether sensible images are necessary to self-communion, or man ever thinks in perfect abstraction from the words with which he is accustomed to clothe his ideas in speaking. Much matter for interesting debate might be supplied by raising points on the inquiry—what is sound? Does it necessarily resolve itself into distinct elements, known to us as letters, or were these the result of special revelation from God?

As each species of the inferior creation was naturally endued with power to utter a peculiar sound, which has continued to be characteristic of its nature to the present time; so, had it not been for Divine interposition, one human language would probably have prevailed throughout every age and territory of the world. Nor, when it was attempted to impart ideas by signs, would it appear natural to invent a system so refined and complicated as that of an alphabet, which should indicate to the eye, by a variety of new combinations, ideas and names already familiar to the ear. It is much more probable that rude pictures of the objects to be represented would constitute

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the first effort to interchange thought without the medium of sound. Symbols of a certain order, under the modifying influence of physical necessities and growing mental strength, might easily be made to combine with their literal signification a figurative sense, expressive of the emotions and affections of the heart. Nor does it appear how man could describe many of his own propensities, except by reference to the lower animals, whose actions and habits, attentively observed, would be found strikingly to correspond to certain characteristics of human nature, which might be graphically depicted by the figure of the species in which that one property was predominant.

An illustration of my meaning occurs in the use of the serpent as an emblem of subtilty. It is designated, by the sacred writer, "the most subtile of all the beasts of the field," thereby indicating both the original difference of instinct in beasts, and the peculiar quality for which the serpent tribe was distinguished. Now the figure of this animal would be a natural mode of conveying the idea of subtilty to the mind through the eye, and infinitely more simple than the invention of phonetic signs to represent separate elements of the sound by which it was known to the ear. Moreover, if the necessity of written forms was first discovered, either to note the divisions of time, to instruct youth, to transmit memorable circumstances to posterity, or to communicate with the absent, the symbolic mode would seem far preferable to the alphabetic; but if they were invented to recall names, and not to pourtray things, which is very improbable, then some elementary signs must have gradually obtained similar to the letters of our alphabet. The power of lan-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

guage necessarily augments, in proportion to the progress of the mind in useful knowledge and industrious habits. The culture of the soil, as our first parents' chief employment, no doubt suggested many terms applicable to other affairs and duties. Abel was a keeper of sheep, probably for the purposes of sacrifice, as well as for the ordinary objects of life, and Cain was a tiller of the ground. Division of labour, thus early introduced, would tend to enrich language. Clothing, habitations, implements of husbandry, domestic and sacred utensils, would not only require names, but suggest terms significant of other things to which they were intimately allied. "The Lord God," it is said, "made Adam and Eve coats of skins;" who, having been thus supernaturally instructed in things immediately necessary for use, would obtain many new words from the labour necessary to modify and arrange different materials in promotion of their daily comfort; while the moral circumstances under which additional wants originated would contribute to increase the number of vocables, and perpetuate their primary import; as the word for garment, derived from the moral necessity of covering the person, would always be associated with the idea of concealment. But the copiousness of symbols thus invented would greatly depend on the progress made in manual employments, their number, nature, and variety, with the degree of skill acquired in art or science of any kind; while the operations of the mind would be best described by reference to physical labour, at once common and important. Man being *sui generis* in a world of which he had the ostensible dominion, could not fully depict his own character and pursuits, except by alternate reference from the body to the mind, and from the mind

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

to the body; and, therefore, his resources of personal illustration must be derived principally from himself, the habits of no other creature being adequate to supply similes of equal power with the facts of his individual history and experience.

The more ancient languages may reasonably be expected to proceed on a scheme distinguished by close conformity to the existing systems of nature and art. Human beings, designed to be both imitative and progressive, must have owed their improvement, in the early ages of the world, chiefly to their gradual acquaintance with the properties of the visible creation. Isolated tribes, in later times, whose mental energies have been at all developed, make their social and political systems coincide with surrounding natural objects; whence we infer that the physical position of any part of the human family will, in a great degree, decide, not only their external condition, but their mental character and acquirements also, especially where they are left entirely to their own culture.

Perhaps it may be assumed, without fear of contradiction, that, from certain characteristics in their language, polity, ethics, habits, manners, superstitions, and prejudices, the Chinese, though a very ancient race, are not the aborigines of the country they now inhabit, but are descended from a nation highly civilized, subtile, intelligent, and superstitious, whose general properties have been perpetuated from time immemorial by virtue of the *imitative* principle in human nature having been restricted in its operations to the example of superiors in age and station. Emigrants would naturally retain the customs of their father-land with feelings of peculiar affection, and as naturally enjoin them on their descend-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ants, by whom they would be adopted and transmitted to posterity through all succeeding generations.

Supposing, for the sake of argument, that Egypt was the parent country of the Chinese, who, at an unknown æra, migrated to the territory they now occupy, should we not expect to find, in the speech and usages of the colonists, even at this distant epoch, some affinities with the language and customs of their ancestors, and, in the national characteristics of the two countries, some points of mutual resemblance? If, then, the principle on which I am proceeding be granted, many of the present peculiarities of the Chinese are readily accounted for. It not only furnishes a clue to the origin of various social habits and daily practices, but explains the rise of the great dogma of veneration for parents and ancestors, which, with them, has pre-eminence over every other consideration, moral, political, or religious. Their patriarchal system will then appear not to have owed its origin to the ingenuity of the sage whose name it bears, but to the traditionary testimony of the ancients whose general sentiments it embodies. This supposition is, to a certain extent, corroborated by their own historians, who represent Confucius, not as having invented a new system of philosophy, but only as having illustrated and expanded the doctrines of chieftains and kings of antiquity; which, indeed, according to his own testimony, he collected from existing records of a purer age in the infancy of the world.

It is far more probable that China and Egypt, comparing them to two mighty rivers, should have issued from one fountain, than that they should be parallel streams flowing from independent sources, since there is strong

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

mutual resemblance between the manners and usages of the two countries; and, even where dissimilarity exists, it is only in cases naturally referrible to desuetude, from which the most revered practices are not exempt. It should be remembered, notwithstanding the ridicule cast upon them by western nations, that the Chinese were separated from the rest of the human family at a very early period of its history, and that they at this day observe many maxims and precepts prevalent among the ancient Hebrews, whom they especially resemble in good sense, and their sententious mode of expressing ideas. Now, on perceiving points of similitude in civil customs and sacred ceremonies, moral apothegms and legislative enactments, between the Chinese and the Hebrews, and knowing that the latter were a considerable time in Egypt, is it unreasonable to attribute this similitude to the access both nations once had to one common source?

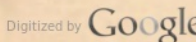
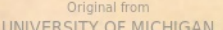
But we must be careful not to argue in a circle. I regard it as an axiom of inspired wisdom in the arrangements of Hebrew polity, not to change customs already familiar, except from absolute necessity, on moral or religious grounds; so that whatever the Israelites had learned under the rule of Pharaoh would be perpetuated by daily practice in the wilderness and in the land of Canaan, if their reverence for the Supreme Jehovah and their mutual regard were not thereby likely to be diminished, as it was, in too many instances, by doing, from previous habit, things contrary to the Divine will. If, then, we find peculiar coincidences and corresponding practices in the detail of ordinary life between the Chinese and the Hebrews, which preceded, by many centuries, the dispersion of the Jews, and the introduction of Buddhism

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and Mahomedanism into China, shall we not have presumptive evidence that the Chinese and the Egyptians were anciently in close connection, if they were not originally one people? But this subject shall be more fully discussed in its proper place.

The object of this chapter is to develope and illustrate the ideographic nature of the Chinese language, and to compare it, as far as practicable, with the Egyptian. The elementary principles of the written system consist of two hundred and fourteen characters, usually, by Europeans, denominated radicals, but by natives 字部 tsze-poo. Now, poo signifies, in botanical language, the class or genus of trees, and is also applied to a tribe of men, to the five original elements of nature, and to the six supreme tribunals at Peking; hence the use of the word to denote the elements of the language includes the idea that "heads of classes" is their appropriate designation. Thus, when you ask a Chinese to what root any character belongs, it is proper to say 這個字在何部 chay ko tsze tsae ho poo—"this character is placed under what class?" or 字部首是甚麼 tsze poo show she shin mo—"head-class, character what?" The following syllabus comprehends the general ideas indicated by these heads of classes, which I have arranged in the order of subjects, but which, for facility of reference, are placed in Chinese dictionaries according to the number of strokes required in their formation, beginning at *one*, and ending with *seventeen:* the *order*, therefore, is mine.

1. Heavenly Objects—sun, moon, time, measured by the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and the constellation of the Great Bear, which is worshipped in China.


Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

2. Atmospheric Phenomena—wind, rain, frost, vapour, sound.

3. Man, as a generic term—one's self, the human frame—its members and properties—head, heart, face, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, tongue, teeth, hands, feet, skin, hair, flesh, blood, bones, nails, sinews. Relations of life—father, son, daughter. State incident to humanity—sickness, old age, death. Spirit—demon—or the shade of a human being. External condition—a servant, a scholar.

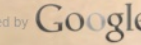
4. Animals, wild and domestic—as the tiger, dragon, tortoise, cow, sheep, dog, horse, hog, stag, squirrel, rabbit, rat, mouse, frog or toad, an insect, a reptile: birds with short tails, and birds in the act of flying: fishes—the alligator; the same character includes the dragon and the lacerta species; the sea-tortoise, and oyster.

5. The five original Elements, which, according to Chinese philosophers, are—fire, water, metal, wood, earth; also, as related to earth—salt-land, hill, valley, mound, field; and, as related to wood—bamboo, a splinter, a branch, a bud.

6. Productions of the Earth; grain—the generic term—pulse, millet, wheat, hemp, paddy, rice, barley, herbs.

7. Qualities perceptible to the senses, comprehending *colour*, *taste*, and *smell*—as black, white, yellow, carnation, azure; sweet, bitter, insipid, fragrant.

8. Domestic utensils, instruments of husbandry, tools, weapons, and things appropriated to sacred uses—these are, a mortar, a dish, a measure, a tripod with ears, a spoon, a knife, a hatchet, a pencil, a square vessel or chest, a stand or seat, a barb or hook, a ploughshare, boat, carriage; bow, arrow, dart, shield, lance, spear, drum; an incense-pot, or an earthenware vase or urn; fragrant


Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

wine used to invoke the descent of the gods; the character also denotes the herb from which it is made.

9. Abstract and concrete terms, minerals, and names of things not reducible to any particular class—as, error, strength, a journey, great, small, slender, long, one, two, eight, a door, a receptacle, the flame of a candle, a covering for the head, garments, a slight stroke, veins on wood or stone, a channel for water to flow in, an instrument of music, tiles.

10. Characters denoting action or passion, called by the Chinese, *living characters*, in contradistinction to nouns, which they designate *dead* characters;—these mean, to creep, to step, to walk, to walk swiftly, to run, to fly, to arrive at, to stop, to stand, to descend, to join hands, to fight, to kill, to imitate, to use, to compare, to produce, to see, to speak, to admonish, to divine, to disturb, to follow, to enter, to protect, to cover, to owe, to collect, to fold, to embroider, to tremble, to eat.

From the preceding classification we remark, first—that the Chinese language appears to have been originally framed with a view to depict natural and familiar objects: secondly—that as the existence of many of the characters indicates considerable progress in civilization, it is reasonable to infer that this is a modified and improved form of preceding systems based on the same principle: thirdly—that in process of time many names of things were borrowed to denote abstract ideas; and hence, probably, the origin of the term "borrowed characters," now used to denote figurative language: fourthly—that the tenth class, which we should call verbs, is derived from the names and qualities of things, in accordance with the principle that

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

one Chinese character generally subserves the uses of an adjective, a substantive, and a verb; as, 大 ta, *great, greatness,* and *to make great; and* 善 shen, *virtuous, virtue, to make virtuous;* subject to no change but that of a different tone in enunciation: fifthly—that we here recognise the three great powers—Heaven, Earth, and Man—into which the Chinese divide the universe, as the foundation of their system of writing; and, therefore, cannot but regard ideas as the principal end its symbols were designed to answer, more especially as the representations of things in ordinary use, and circumstances occurring in daily life, were added to complete the system: sixthly—it is manifest that these elementary signs have no property in common with an alphabet, syllabic or literal; for, although particular sounds are appropriated to them, they do not affect the name of any character of which, as root, primitive or radical, they form a part; and therefore it is evident, seventhly—that, so far as the genius of the Chinese language is embodied in its primitives, it is totally distinct from an alphabetic tongue.

Western philologists, who, with little practical knowledge, frame theories on the origin of this language, egregiously mistake the true nature of the written medium; and as a specimen of their opinions, and the mode of reasoning adopted in support of them, is embodied in a recent treatise on Chinese writing by Dr. Ponceau,* an American

* The title of the work is as follows: "A Dissertation on the Nature and Character of the Chinese System of Writing, in a letter to John Vaughan, Esq. By Peter S. Du Ponceau, LL.D., President of the American Philosophical Society, of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and of the Athenæum of Philadelphia; Corresponding Member of the Institute of France, &c. &c. To which are subjoined a Vocabulary of the Cochin-Chinese Language, by Father Joseph Marrone, R. C. Missionary at Saigon, with refer-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

philologist, I now proceed to examine his proposed theory, with a view to prove that its principles not only differ from those on which the best native and foreign Chinese scholars interpret the language, but are at direct variance with obvious facts of daily occurrence in its use and application.

If the philosophy of an alphabetic language cannot be understood without competent practical knowledge, much more is indefatigable application essential to a just acquaintance with the principles of the Chinese tongue, destitute as it is of all known grammatical forms.

It is indeed highly gratifying to observe that ingenious philosophers and persons of literary eminence, in Europe and America, devote their ample powers to the cultivation of the Chinese tongue; and I most cordially sympathize with Dr. Ponceau, when he says, "It is greatly to be wished that this curious graphic system should be studied with a view to the science of general philology." It has long been an established conviction of my mind, from which I was principally induced to enter on the present subject, that the study of symbolical language conduces to elucidate the mind and manners of the human species; and that, when it becomes the sole written medium of a numerous people, who also occupy an immense territory, it is calculated to reflect new and interesting light on the position of man as a moral, intellectual, and physical

ences to plates containing the characters belonging to each word, and with Notes showing the degree of affinity existing between the Chinese and Cochin-Chinese Languages, and the use they respectively make of their common system of writing. By M. De Palun, late Consul of France at Richmond, in Virginia. And a Cochin-Chinese and Latin Dictionary, in use among the R. C. missions in Cochin-China. Published by order of the American Philosophical Society, by their Historical and Literary Committee. Philadelphia, 1838."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

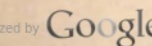
being. To say nothing of the claims of philosophy and general science, if our political and commercial relations with China be deemed worthy of honourable preservation, the period is arrived when the utmost attention should be devoted to the cultivation of her original language, by which alone her theories of political economy and moral sentiments can be understood. Not only would more accurate information then be procured respecting this distant and mighty empire, but we should be able to communicate to her subjects a knowledge of the most valuable of our arts and sciences, and thereby obtain facilities for diffusing the important doctrines of Divine Revelation.

But while efforts to rouse the attention of the learned to this mighty topic evince laudable zeal for the culture of a long-neglected branch of philology, they are conducted on principles strangely at variance with the dictates of sound philosophy and true wisdom. The argument *à priori* may be of some importance, where probable circumstances are not contradicted by facts, but must surely be altogether inadmissible when employed, not only as a substitute for logical deductions from facts established beyond all reasonable doubt, but even to discredit their very existence.

The following propositions are quoted from Dr. Ponceau, as representing the sentiments of numerous philologists in Europe and America practically unacquainted with Chinese :*—

"1. That the Chinese system of writing is not, as has been supposed, *ideographic;* that its characters do not

* See p. 31 of the Introduction to the above work.


Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

represent ideas, but words; and therefore I have called it *lexigraphic*.

"2. That ideographic writing is a creature of the imagination, and cannot exist, but for very limited purposes, which do not entitle it to the name of writing.

"3. That among men endowed with the gift of speech, all writing must be a direct representation of the spoken language, and cannot present ideas to the mind abstracted from it.

"4. That all writing, as far as we know, represents language in some of its elements, which are words, syllables, and simple sounds. In the first case, it is lexigraphic, in the second syllabic, and in the third alphabetical or elementary.

"5. That the lexigraphic system of the Chinese cannot be applied to a polysyllabic language, having inflections and grammatical forms; and that there is no example of its having been so applied, unless partially or occasionally, or as a special, elliptical, and enigmatical mode of communication, limited in its uses; but not as a general system of writing intended for common use.

"6. That it may be applied to a monosyllabic language, formed on the model of the Chinese; but that it will necessarily receive modifications and alterations, which will produce material differences in the value and signification of the characters between different languages, however similar in their original structure; therefore,

"7. That nations whose languages, like the Japanese, and, it is said, the Loo-chuan, are polysyllabic, and have inflections and grammatical forms, although they may employ Chinese characters in their alphabet, cannot possibly understand Chinese books and manuscripts, unless

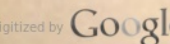
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

they have learned the Chinese language; and that, if those nations whose languages are monosyllabic, and who use the Chinese characters lexigraphically, can understand Chinese writings without knowing the language, it can only be to a limited extent, which it is one of the objects of this publication to ascertain.

"Although strongly impressed with the conviction of the truth of these propositions, it is, nevertheless, with great deference that I submit them to the judgment of the learned."

Such are the propositions Dr. Ponceau proceeds to establish, on no better basis than the theoretical impossibility of a language without an alphabet; for on this figment alone, it may be truly affirmed, his opinions and conclusions rest. Ignorance of a subject on which there are conflicting statements may be reasonably alleged as an excuse for withholding an opinion; but can hardly, with persons of common sense, justify opposition to practical scholars: yet, if we may judge from the tenor of his remarks,* Dr. Ponceau considers his ignorance of Chinese a more valuable qualification for testing the true nature of the system of writing, than the practical wisdom of the Catholic missionaries, Sir G. T. Staunton, Dr. Morrison, Dr. Marshman, and all other Chinese scholars, foreign or native, whom he does not hesitate to designate enthusiasts; at whose feet, however, it behoves him to sit, not as a critic, but as a disciple, if he would acquire a just knowledge of the language. It is a remarkable phenomenon, whether it belong to the intellectual or moral world, that practical sinologists, who concurrently represent the principle of grouping ideas together to form a

* Letter to John Vaughan, Esq., pp. 5, 6, 7, and 108.


Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

new thought as characteristic of the language, are all deeply involved in error; while the exclusive ability to extricate them from it rests with one who, according to his own testimony, cannot translate a single Chinese term of the most familiar description. Chinese scholars, many years in the habit of constant intercourse, both written and oral, with learned natives — who have read the literature of the country, translated the works of other nations into the Chinese tongue, and published important treatises, in different European languages, illustrative of its properties, are all, it should seem, either destitute of the understanding necessary to attribute its characteristics to their proper source, or possessed of no higher moral sense than wilfully to mislead their confiding disciples of the western hemisphere; while one who pretends to no acquaintance with the language, yet ascribes to it a national alphabet, misinterprets the design of its radicals, and alleges that its symbols are necessarily read "by all in the same words,"* contrary to facts established by the daily practice of the Chinese, who throughout China understand Imperial edicts written in the same character, while the sounds of those characters differ in every province, is alone possessed of the sagacity requisite to decide on the nature of the Chinese system of writing.

Circumstances in favour of the ideographic nature of the Chinese language are disposed of in the following summary manner:—"It is true that, in the grouping of characters to represent single words, the inventors have called to their aid the ideas which the words express: thus the character which answers to the word *hand* is grouped with those which answer to words expressing

* Letter to John Vaughan, Esq., p. 4.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

manual operations. But this was not done with a view to an ideographic language; it was merely an auxiliary means to aid in the classification of the numerous signs, which otherwise the memory could not have retained. The sinologists see great beauties in these associations, of which I am not competent to speak. I suspect, however, there is in that more imagination than reality."* No reason whatever is assigned for this opinion. It must be correct, because Dr. Ponceau's theory cannot dispense with it; and this is all the satisfaction afforded to the inquirer. But the doctor must have been grossly imposed upon, when he asserts, "that versification, poetry, and measured prose, is written in the pretended ideographic character, word for word, exactly as it is spoken; and *no two readings can absolutely take place;*" than which nothing can be more false. In the seventh section, which is devoted to the overthrow of the ideographic system, the doctor severely censures the sentiments of those whom he styles "the enthusiasts of Chinese writing"—a singular misapplication of terms—that the practical scholar should be the enthusiast, and the imaginative theorist the only safe guide. Entirely unacquainted with both the Mandarin and Fŭh-këën dialects, about which he writes, the doctor still, in his own opinion, so satisfactorily refutes his opponents, that at the conclusion of two or three pages, which exhibit most deplorable ignorance of the subject, he adds: "I am almost ashamed to have to answer such arguments"—those of Dr. Marshman and others, on the nature of Chinese writing; "and yet they are urged by men to whose opinions on other subjects I would submit with respect." With a due sense

* Letter to John Vaughan, Esq., p. 109.

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of the doctor's condescension in deigning to answer the arguments of practical sinologists, which are impugned evidently because they are misunderstood, I must candidly acknowledge that I have been involved in a dilemma equally trying—between a conviction of the undignified employment of refuting his misstatements, and an apprehension that, if uncontradicted, they might pass currently for truth among those who are ignorant of Chinese. My apology, therefore, for noticing them so extensively rests not on their profoundness or originality, but simply on the danger of their favourable reception among *alphabetic* philologists, to whom they may appear plausible.

The great obstacle to the progress of truth, in Dr. Ponceau's mind, seems to arise from a preconceived theory, despite the most stubborn facts, and the most logical conclusions derivable therefrom. He fosters error not so much from ignorance of the allegations of competent witnesses, as disinclination to believe their testimony, which he unceremoniously avows, without the slightest attempt to invalidate it. His account of the dialects of the Chinese empire, especially the Fŭh-këèn, is most incorrect. Part of this incorrectness, however, may be owing to Dr. Marshman, from whose "Clavis Sinica" it is taken, and who did not understand Fŭh-këèn. But it is Dr. Ponceau who says, "we know very little of the dialects of the Chinese empire, as we are not permitted to penetrate into that country." Does the learned doctor not know that there are colonies of Chinese in every part of the Indian Archipelago, where hundreds of thousands are permanently located, who speak the Fŭh-këèn, Canton, and other dialects, and that opportunities of intercourse, by means of commerce, are afforded continually with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

natives from the coast of China, at Singapore, Java, Bankok, and many other settlements in those seas? The grand principle of the language, which the doctor has yet to learn, and with which he must become familiar if he ever be a competent Chinese scholar, notwithstanding its enthusiastic nature, is to *distinguish the written system from the colloquial medium.* For so far from there being one set of sounds invariably affixed to the characters throughout the empire, as the doctor asserts, each province has its own mode of speaking; and while the Chinese have but one literature, and one method of writing, these characters nevertheless preserve the same *power* and *order*, and are understood alike by every one capable of reading, from Peking to Canton. The doctor seems to consider the provincial dialects as written.* I lived for several years at a British settlement in the Indian Archipelago, amongst Chinese who used the Fŭh-kĕĕn, Canton, and Mandarin dialects; and I have yet to be informed that there is more than one written language. I studied the Mandarin under the direction of a learned graduate, sent from China Proper, by the late Dr. Morrison; and, having acquired it, could communicate, by merely altering the sounds, with the natives from the province of Canton. I also studied the Fŭh-kĕĕn dialect, under a native of that province, who had taught his countrymen for many years. The teachers in both cases *read the same books*, composed in the *same style*, and attached precisely the *same idea to the written symbols;* but *could not understand each other in conversation.* I have, indeed, been the interpreter between two Chinese from different provinces, whose dialects I had studied; and, therefore,

* Letter to John Vaughan, Esq., see p. 83.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

so far from admitting the truth of the assertion—"if two Chinese read the same book, they will read it exactly alike, there will not be the difference of a single syllable,"* I must declare, from long experience, that it is absolutely false; unless it applies to persons of the same district; which would, in that case, be totally inapplicable, it having never been alleged that the Chinese could not converse together; but I do aver that a Fŭh-kēēn man,† who only spoke his native dialect, would find as much difficulty in communicating with a person who spoke no other than the Mandarin, as an Englishman, knowing only his own tongue, would with a Frenchman or a German; and yet he would understand the Mandarin *better* than a provincial dialect. There is in the Fŭh-kēēn dialect the peculiarity of two different classes of sound; one used in reading, the other in speaking; the former of which, in the native *patois*, is designated *ge yim*, "characters' sounds"—the other, *kong wa*, "spoken language;" so that, in reading a Chinese book, you not only pronounce the characters differently from the Mandarin, but are also taught another class of sounds, to be used in conversation, or when expressing ideas without written symbols; a practice in direct opposition to the statement, that "no two readings can absolutely take place." But to exemplify this remark by an illustration or two. A student of this dialect must first commit to memory, from a book, the *reading* sounds of the character; and after having become familiar with a page or two, he learns a

* Letter to John Vaughan, Esq., p. 109.

† Some years ago a man from the province of Fŭh-kēēn went up to Peking to present a petition to the Emperor; but, knowing only his native dialect, he was utterly unintelligible at court.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

few of the characters marked with red ink, which the teacher explains, *vivâ voce*, in the conversational medium. The process of instruction is, with this exception, the same as in the Mandarin.

The following characters are given as they are pronounced in the Mandarin and in the Fŭh-keėn dialects; the former of which, it will be observed, is the same in reading and speaking; while the latter not only differs generally from the Mandarin, but also from itself, by superadding sounds in speaking, totally distinct from those used in reading the character.

	MANDARIN, reading and speaking.	FUH-KEEN, reading.	FUH-KEEN, speaking.	MEANING.
從	t'sung	t'sheong	t'an	to follow
人	jin	jin	lâng	man
田	t'eên	t'eam	tshan	a field
問	wăn	boöŭn	mooine	to ask
行	hing	hėėng	keang	to walk
父	foo	hoo	neong-pay	father
目	mŭh	bŏk	bak-chew	the eye
天	t'ëēn	t'ëēn	tne	heaven
算	swan	soöan	sooine	to reckon
書	shoo	see	c'hait	a book

As my object, in these examples, is to show the difference between the Nan-king, or Mandarin, and the Fŭh-keėn, I trust I have quoted a sufficient number to constitute a fair specimen of the characteristics of each, and to evince the impracticability of intelligible conversation between two individuals not specially instructed in the same provincial dialect. It is, on the other hand, equally true that these different sounds are attached to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the same symbols, and that these symbols convey precisely the same idea to the eye of every person in the empire, each of whom, though only taught in his native province, could immediately communicate intelligibly by writing with the natives of another province, ever so distant, while they could not converse together. What, then, is the inference deducible from this circumstance?—that the character is not ideographic, and only conveys an idea through a certain fixed sound? Surely no considerate person could thus argue against palpable facts; and yet the first proposition quoted above declares that "the Chinese system of writing is not, as has been supposed, ideographic — that its characters do not represent ideas, but words." *

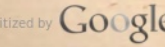
Whether this be in accordance with fact, let the reader judge. The truth is, the idea of an alphabet operates on the mind of a verbal philologist as a sort of literary monomania, by which all his speculations are hampered, and of which he must rid himself entirely, before he can be brought to entertain correct views of symbolical language. The Chinese tongue knows nothing of an alphabet of any description; the anti-symbolist will not believe in the existence of a language without one, and therefore confuses himself and his disciples by a mere play upon the terms—'lexigraphic alphabets,' 'syllabic alphabets,' and 'elementary alphabets,'† one of which he would fain affix to the Chinese characters; but it is a useless addition, and in their energetic metaphors would be represented *by the figure of a snake with feet*—an encumbrance, rather than a benefit. But how will the advocate of such a

* See p. 15 of this Essay.

† See proposition 4th, as quoted above, p. 16.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

system, on the principles it embodies, explain the simple fact, that while numerous conventional sounds, varying in districts as well as provinces, are attached to one symbol— and it might admit of an indefinite number without violating any law of the written language — there should be the same explanation given of its meaning throughout the empire? On the ideographic system all is plain. The meaning and form of the characters are uniform, and, so to speak, inherent; while the sounds are not inherent, but conventional. The grand error committed by western philologists who have studied the principles of such Oriental tongues as the Chinese, Cochin-Chinese, Egyptian, and others, appears to consist in comparing oral affinities instead of similar *forms*, and in taking for granted, contrary to established fact, that each character has a distinct sound; whereas, without the written medium of such languages, they would neither possess unity of purpose nor any fixed principle of interpretation. The characters, indeed, are the mode of communication, to which the dialects are subservient. Hence the opinion often advanced by those who have never studied Chinese, that the language may be learned without the symbols, ought to be totally reversed; since the graphic system which guides the idiom may be acquired for all useful purposes of reading and writing, without the ability to converse; while no one ignorant of the character can speak Chinese to any extent. A person living among natives might, indeed, obtain some knowledge of their colloquial medium without the symbols, but it would consist principally of names of familiar objects and ideas, which, abstracted from their written forms, no Chinaman would ever honour with the designation of scholarship. I am aware that there have



Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

been attempts to make vocabularies of sounds in the Roman letter, unaccompanied with the Chinese character; but these are useless to natives, and of no further benefit to foreigners than to remind them of symbols previously acquired, which must always be present to the eye of the mind before it can apprehend the specific idea attached to the sound.

I am happy to be able to adduce the testimony of the late Dr. Morrison from a preface to his last philological work, "A Vocabulary of the Canton Dialect," in which he intimates that it was his intention, originally, to have omitted the Chinese characters, but it was found on trial that they could not be dispensed with. "The want of the character," says the doctor, "made the mode of communication very imperfect, unless the learner had the constant assistance of a person who already knew the Roman letters and the Chinese language. To convey the spoken language without the character is not impracticable, but is difficult, and often embarrassing to the learner; whereas, the character being presented to the eye of the native makes all simple and easy. The writer has therefore failed in his expectation." Whence the *primary* object of a foreigner who wishes to succeed in his intercourse with China must be, at all events, to acquire a knowledge of the character, with the facility of pronouncing it according to the usage of the Mandarins. Into whatever province he then goes, he will have made provision for speedy success in attaining the local dialect, if its acquisition be needful; since his knowledge of their literature will procure him the respect of the natives, and his ability to write the symbols supply an efficient medium of communication with them on all possible subjects.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

I must still request the reader to bear in mind the distinction between what Chinese writers call the colloquial medium, and the mere sounds of the characters. To all the symbols there are names attached, many of which are the same, and could not be understood by natives without seeing their different forms in writing, unless they were the sounds of characters taken from a book written in the usual mode of conversation. There is, indeed, nothing more difficult, even to an experienced scholar, than to affix the appropriate symbols to homophonous words written in the Roman letter. It is remarkable, not only that each sound consists of but one syllable; or, more correctly, is effected by a single impulse of the breath, but that many different ideas having diversified symbols should be pronounced alike. In exemplification of the comparative number of written forms attached to one sound, I may adduce the words *tsan*, *le*, *chin*, *he*, and *e*, perhaps of the most frequent occurrence in the Chinese language, each of which, in the preceding order, has, respectively, sixty, eighty, one hundred, one hundred and eighty, and two hundred and sixty-five symbols, every one differing in form and meaning. This comparison is deduced from the abstract of Morrison's Dictionary,* syllabically arranged in the order of the English alphabet, which comprises only about one-third of the characters explained in the first part, and therefore is to be considered as a specimen on a reduced scale. It will hence, I apprehend, appear clear to the reader, that unless one specific character be imprinted on the retina, concurrently with the aural impression produced by the sound, the latter cannot convey to the mind any definite idea. Some illustration of this

* Vol. I. Part II.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

circumstance is afforded by a proper name in English, representing numerous individuals totally unlike in person, of different families, dissimilar in rank and station, who could not be recognised without some distinctive prænomen or characteristic appellative; but the sight of whom, to one acquainted with several of that name, would immediately suffice. The Chinese symbol, delineated by the pencil, may be regarded as a representative of the idea, which it is impossible to mistake; while a single verbal name would be so ambiguous as to require it either to be written or coupled with a synonymous character of a different sound. For example, the word *tsze* has the following variety of graphic forms, according to the idea it is designed to express; namely, 子 *son;* 自 *self;* 字 *literature;* 慈 *tenderness;* 疵 *moral defect;* 祠 *sacrifice;* 咨 *to state to a superior;* 賜 *to bestow on an inferior;* about which, though thus isolated, there is not the slightest ambiguity when written. But in order to make the particular idea intelligible in conversation *tsze* requires to be associated with the following words: 兒 urh; 己 ke; 文 wan; 悲 pei; 病 ping; 祀 sze; 稟 pin; 賞 shang; the union of which in this manner—urh-tsze, son; tsze-ke, self; tsze-wăn, literature; tsze-pei, compassion; tsze-ping, sickness; tsze-sze, sacrifice; tsze-pin, to state to a superior; shang-tsze, to bestow on an inferior — constitutes the broad distinction between the colloquial and classical style of writing. Authors who write in the familiar manner would use *two* symbols; those who affect the ancient sententious style, only one. It is the names of symbols in the latter style which are so frequently confounded with the oral language; whereas, writers on Chinese, who use the term oral and colloquial medium, never

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

mean the sounds of written composition, except in the most familiar style; and then the term colloquial is as applicable to writing as speaking. Of this, however, some foreign scholars appear to have no conception, or they would not have called the Mandarin, which is only a particular mode of orally distinguishing the character, the modern language of China, in contradistinction to the classical style of antiquity.

Now since there are eighteen provinces in China, and the mode of conversation between the natives in one district differs totally from that used in another, while according to the verbal theorist each character of the language is the representation of a specific sound, through which alone the idea is conveyed, it may not be impertinent to ask which of the many sounds now given to a symbol was the *original* one? This character 人 is pronounced in Mandarin *jin*, in Canton *yun*, in Fŭh-këën *lâng*—can the advocate of that theory tell us which of these sounds the figure was designed to paint? The idea it conveys, notwithstanding the ridicule attempted to be attached to the notion, not only throughout China, but also in Japan, Cochin-China, Corea, and the Loo-choo islands, is "man;" although the sounds attached to it—the vocables by which the idea is represented—entirely differ in each country, as it is reasonable to suppose they would, without the guidance of an alphabet. The alphabetic philologist forgets that syllables and words, strictly speaking, belong only to alphabetic languages, and that sound cannot bear the same relation to a written system without an alphabet, that it does to one whose distinguishing characteristic is the reduction of sound to its first elements by means of letters. Sounds, in Chinese,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

whatever may be asserted to the contrary, are known only as the *names* of *symbols*, and might with equal propriety have been exchanged for others, monosyllabic or polysyllabic: thus if some persons were to agree to call this figure 人 *man*; others, *homo*; others, *ανθρωπος*; others, אדם; others, *orang*; provided they all attached the same idea to it, this diversity of pronunciation could not change its form, or interfere with its order in a sentence, both which properties exist independently of sound; and consequently the idea would be equally intelligible to all when written, and equally obscure when spoken. It is a great mistake to call the primitives an alphabet, with which, as that term is usually understood, they have nothing in common, their office, as literal or syllabic, having no influence over sound; nor have they any alphabetic existence, except in the imagination of misguided foreigners. Such a theory would indeed go to prove that the Chinese have no fixed medium of intelligible communication; for if their characters have no ideas other than as connected with sounds similar to an alphabet, then a character composed of several symbols, each of which has a distinct meaning, cannot possibly convey a complex idea, because every Chinese character, however complex its form, is expressed by a simple, monosyllabic sound, usually, though not uniformly, different from that of any of its component parts, and therefore the Chinese system of writing has no ideas; and as their spoken medium is very imperfectly understood without a knowledge of the character, the logical conclusion to which an unprejudiced mind must come is, that the Chinese have no certain medium of communication, either verbal or graphic. Still it is this system for which the learned American contends: I will therefore

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

give it in his own words. "So* far at least no sign appears of an ideographic language, as the Chinese writing has been called. Its object, as far as we have seen, is not to recal ideas to the mind abstracted from sounds, but the sounds or words in which language has clothed those ideas. The written signs do not represent sounds in the elementary form of letters, but in the compound form of syllables and words. They have precisely the same effects as syllables and words, and do not advance a step farther into the ideal world."†

According to this statement, the following characters 禮 氂 黧 離 理 ought to be pronounced agreeably to the elements of which they are composed; namely, the first in order, 禮 *she, keŭh, tow*, these being the sounds of the component symbols; 示 *she*, "supernatural manifestation;" 曲 *keŭh*, "a song;" and 豆 *tow*, "a vessel;" which, united, mean, "rites, decorum, propriety, the principles of social order and personal politeness, civil rank and religious homage, rites and ceremonial usages generally." But what is the fact? It is pronounced *le*, a sound totally different from any of these: the second 氂 composed of 牙 *ya*, "teeth," 文 *wan*, "literature," 厂 *han*, "a shelter," and 毛 *maou*, "hair," means the tail of a horse or cow; strong curly hair; hair in a mixed, confused state; and, hence, every thing very small or minute: it is also pronounced *le*, equally unconnected with the sounds of its component parts; the third 黧 compounded of 禾 *ho*, "grain," 勺 *chŏ*, "to pour out," and 黑 *hih*, "black," signifying black; and a black and yellow cow said to resemble a tiger, has the same sound, *le;* the

* Dr. Ponceau, from page 70 to 81.
† See Dr. Ponceau, sec. 2, page 24.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

fourth 離 is formed of 隹 *chuy*, "wings," and 离 *che*, "to disperse;" hence the principal idea is "to separate from," or "to depart;" the fifth, composed of 王 *yŭh* "a diamond" and 里 *le*, means "to work or polish gems, to control, to rule, to pay attention to;" hence its secondary meanings are—"principles in matter—in bodies—in man—in the universe—a principle of order and of immateriality." From these examples, which are all pronounced *le*, it is evident that sounds were not intended to be conveyed by the component parts of the symbols; that although a portion of the character sometimes gives the sound to the whole (as in the last of those quoted above), it is itself composed of elements with whose sounds it has no affinity; and that in the composition of symbols there is an association of ideas, from which their form and meaning are both ultimately derived. Dr. Ponceau assures his readers, with a confidence justifiable only in one who had been present at their original formation, that the Chinese symbols were not intended primarily to represent ideas, but sounds. On the question, however, *how* these sounds were to be represented by such means, the doctor sheds no light whatever. "The ideas," he says, "were only an ingredient in the method which they adopted, but it was by no means their object to present them to the mind unaccompanied by the word which was their model, and which, if I may use a bold metaphor, sat to them for its picture; a picture indeed which bore no resemblance to the object, but which was sufficient to recal it to the memory."* Now, before we concede this principle, it certainly behoves the doctor to inform us to which of the numerous symbols mentioned above, the words, *tsan*, that

* Introduction, page 14.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

has sixty, *le* eighty, *chin* a hundred, *ke* a hundred and eighty, and *e* two hundred and sixty-five *different pictures,* sat for their likenesses; each of which, considered as a symbol of thought, is pregnant with significancy and adorned with beauty; whereas, on the opposite principle, the whole number of forms belonging to each of the examples—and many more might be adduced—is necessarily one confused mass of unmeaning, useless figures; since if the utility of the character be confined to its sound, and there is but one sound to each class, the rest of the characters are superfluous. What then becomes of Dr. Ponceau's metaphorical embellishment, totally repugnant as it is both to sound reasoning and common sense, when applied to the principles of the Chinese system of writing? But there is another view of the case—to my mind most decisive. Not only does the ideographic system derive support from the great variety of characters, of different forms and significations, attached to one sound, but also from the different names given to the same symbol in different provinces and districts, which was originally a rude delineation of one object; a circumstance which may very naturally suggest the inquiries—which of these sounds sat for its picture? what became of the original sound?—for, on this principle, there could be but one—and how did numerous sounds occur in a system which supposes each character specially invented to delineate one particular sound? The doctor professes his entire ignorance, in its literal meaning, of the phrase 法身的時候 *fă shin teih she how,* "the period when the body puts forth itself"—which he quotes from Morrison's Dictionary, under the word "puberty," but *supposes* it does not militate against his views; and yet he attempts

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

to correct Dr. Morrison's translation of 會意 *hwuy e*, "association of ideas in compounding characters;" which, though two distinct symbols, he calls one word, and defines, "the association or combining of several words in their appropriate characters to represent another word:" which is given as the translation of *hwuy*, "to assemble, to associate, to combine;" and *e*, "an idea, intention, meaning," making both characters to be only one word. Our learned theorist seems so strangely to misapprehend the object of treatises on Chinese, that he quotes, in favour of his own system, part of a translation, made by the late M. Remusat, professor of Chinese at Paris, of a brief comparison between symbolic and alphabetic tongues, as exemplified in the Chinese and the English (inserted in Morrison's Dictionary), which I cannot but think totally at variance with his views. The following translation, from the original Chinese, contains all that relates to our present subject. "The languages of the world are no fewer than two hundred; whose grammatical properties and written forms differ considerably from each other. The principles, however, on which their written systems are framed, resolve themselves into two: — one conveying sound and sense — the other imparting ideas, by figure, without sound. Of the former class are the Man-chow Tartar, the Sanskrit,* the English, and other languages of the kingdoms of Europe in the western part of the world; of the latter class are the ancient Egyptian characters, and the ancient and modern characters of China. Perhaps, on comparison of the two modes, there will be some difficulty in determining which is the superior. It is certainly a defect in symbolic language, that, from in-

* The language of 梵 Fan.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

aptitude to communicate its own sounds, the student should be obliged to commit them to memory, and that there should be no visible representative of abstract ideas, which, though sought in the composition of the character, will not (always) be found. But it also has its advantages; inasmuch as the form of the character, uninfluenced by local dialects, is preserved invariably the same; this is a point of much importance. The English language is read from left to right, like the Man-chow Tartar, with this exception, that the latter is read in columns from the top to the bottom, and the former horizontally; the English has twenty-six letters (mother-spelling-characters), which, by changes of position and new combinations, may be made to produce an infinite variety of words and sounds. This alphabet resembles the method of spelling resorted to in Kang-he's Lexicon, which was framed for the purpose of communicating sounds, not ideas; only that by forming a word of alphabetic letters, you can also produce an idea. Thus read the alphabet arranged in order on the right, agreeably to the sounds of the Chinese characters opposite to them, as they are known at Nan-king — the Mandarin dialect — and you will then have the pronunciation of the English spelling letters." After giving directions to a native how to acquire the method of spelling and reading English, the author concludes by saying: — "Although the English alphabet is the same as that of the ancient Romans, the French, the Americans, and the Portuguese, and their use of them the same, yet by different methods of combination entirely different languages are produced."

From this notice of Chinese in its own tongue, the

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

writer evidently considers its characteristic feature to be, not phonetic, but symbolic, in contradistinction to the English, which embraces both properties; he also takes for granted that the Chinese has, strictly speaking, no alphabet, or he would not have explained the uses of an alphabet as a novelty in the tongue in which he wrote. He must likewise regard it as ideographic; because the advantages and defects he ascribes to the Chinese are not applicable on any other principle. I do not know whether it be the composition of Dr. Morrison, or that of a learned native under his superintendence; but most probably it is the doctor's, who would submit it to his teacher for revision; and, therefore, on either supposition, we have the testimony of two very superior Chinese scholars to the symbolical, and, consequently, ideographic nature of the Chinese language. Dr. Ponceau, indeed, admits that "the system adopted by the inventors of the Chinese mode of writing, as it now exists, was that of recalling the words of that language to the memory of the reader by signs, descriptive, as much as possible, of their signification*—which, in my opinion, is virtually surrendering all the peculiarities of his theory; he has only to proceed one step further, and deliberately ask himself how a people without an alphabet are to represent to the eye the idea of visible objects otherwise than by significant delineations of them, and I think he will soon be satisfied of the visionary nature of his favourite theory. Perhaps I ought to apologize to my readers for detaining them so long in exposing this system; but, as Chinese scholars in Europe and America are, unhappily, very few, and it is likely to please persons wholly ignorant of the language, I felt it a

* Page 63.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

duty to refute the erroneous notions advanced, not on account of their intrinsic value, but rather as representing those of a *class* of persons without the means of precise information.

Before, however, we dismiss this part of our subject, it may be well to view it in two or three other points, which will tend to confirm the soundness of our previous conclusions. The Chinese account for the origin of their characters in the following manner. It is received by them as undoubted fact, that in high antiquity knotted cords were used, instead of letters, to convey the purposes of their rulers, and to constitute the signs of ideas. This very imperfect instrument of interchanging thought was succeeded by the original symbols, from which the present system of writing was derived; the invention of which is attributed by Chinese historians to Tsang-hëe, who flourished in the reign of Hwang-te, upwards of two thousand years prior to the Christian æra, and who, from observing a certain constellation in the heavens, the marks or veins on the shell of a tortoise, and the print of a horse's foot on the ground, first conceived the idea of framing a method of intelligible communication through the medium of the eye, which, modified more or less by the existing circumstances of successive dynasties, has prevailed in all its essential particulars from that period to the present. The design of its originators, from the testimony of native scholars, was the best mode of affecting the eye with thoughts, whose characteristics can be accounted for on no other than the principle of ideography. Inaccuracy in chronological and other minor details will not affect the nature of the system. Its properties must be determined by its internal evidence, *whoever* were its

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

authors, *whenever* it was contrived, and *whatever* were the immediate causes of its existence. The ultimate scheme on which it was founded is reducible to a few simple elements, denominated—*resemblance to an object;* as the ☉ sun; the moon; a hill; a horse; the eye; a boat; water; the ear — *reference to some property or circumstance;* as 上 above; 下 below; — *combination of thoughts;* as 信 faith, truth; compounded of *jin,* a man, and *yen,* a word — *sound of the object;* as 河 *ho,* a river; 江 *keang,* a torrent — *contraries,* by reversing or inverting the character; as 正 *ching,* correct, becomes, when reversed, 乏 *fă,* defective; and 之 *che,* to grow out of the ground, inverted, makes 帀 *tsă,* to revolve, to go round — *borrowed, supposed,* or *arbitrary characters;* as 令 *ling,* to command; 長 *chang,* long; the former of which is, by some, arranged under the third class. The following remarks of Dr. Morrison, in the introductory part of his dictionary,* are quoted not only for the sake of his authority in Chinese matters, but because they contain, in small compass, what the writer conceives to be a graphic description of the properties of the language. "To convey ideas to the mind by the eye, the Chinese language answers all the purposes of a written medium, as well as the alphabetic system of the west, and, perhaps, in some respects, better. As sight is quicker than hearing, so ideas reaching the mind by the eye are quicker, more striking, and vivid, than those which reach the mind by the slower progress of sound. The character forms a picture which really is, or, by early associations, is considered beautiful and impressive. The Chinese fine writing (when fully understood, by dispensing with all the

* Page 11.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

minute particles and diffusive expressions, which are absolutely necessary to give to sounds that variety which makes them intelligible in spoken language) darts upon the mind with a vivid flash; a force and a beauty, of which alphabetic language is incapable."

Having dwelt so long on the elementary properties of the Chinese language, I proceed now to notice the methods of forming abstract terms.

It may gratify the curiosity of the philosopher, and aid the philological student, to adduce some examples illustrative of the process of thought, by which transitions have been effected from the names and qualities of things to abstract ideas, the symbols of which originated in mere designations of material substances. I will take, first, some general terms, which have a moral, physical, or metaphysical reference; and afterwards proceed to such as are designated connective and adversative particles, of which the ruder forms of speech are usually, to a great degree, destitute.

The character 化 *hwa*, composed of 人 *jin*, man, and 匕 *pe*, a spoon, or wooden ladle, with which flesh is taken from the pot when performing the rites of sacrifice, means generally *to change;* whose several applications we shall briefly notice, after having sought the origin of this idea from the two symbols of which it is formed. 人 *man*, and 匕 *spoon*, have certainly no apparent connexion with any of the various senses now attached to their symbolic union. But *man*, as the third power in the universe, and, as a primitive of the language, giving birth to numerous symbols more remotely or closely allied to itself, occupies an important representative position.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

[seal character] *spoon*, is also [seal character] *man reversed*. This is now the form of the seal character [seal character]; so that the one part of the symbol [seal character] will consist of man in his proper position [seal character]; and the other part of man *reversed* [seal character]; whence probably the idea of *alteration*, change, transformation, and other similar meanings. But what may be termed the etymological question of a character has very little influence over the numerous significations into which it may be subsequently ramified; hence we find that a word having once become the symbol of the ideas — change, transformation, alteration, transmutation — is applied, according to existing notions of such subjects, to a change in the state of man physically, to death, to the power residing in nature, or the decrees of fate by which death is caused; and in this relation, though not ordinarily used for death, it is the converse of the term "to create;" — applied to life, it signifies a change of form or shape — a metamorphosis — as opposed to oviparous and viviparous creatures; — applied to animals, plants, and other natural objects, it expresses a change in their state, circumstances, or existence; where there is an easy transition to artificial being — from life itself to things without life, which administer to its support, and many others with which man is daily conversant; for example, applied to food, it denotes "digestion," — to circumstances, in connexion with "create," *good fortune;* to trade, "barter;" — to metals, "solution;" — to ingredients mixed together, a change of state; — to fire, the act of being consumed or destroyed. From these and similar uses of the term, meanings are derived analogous to aerial changes; whence again expressions are supplied adapted to the effects of moral and religious systems, the characteristics of which

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

are modified by the philosophical and superstitious sentiments peculiar to the sect that adopts them; thus from the pen of a Confucian 化 would signify the renovating effects produced by the examples of the sages on the minds and conduct of their disciples;—from that of an alchymist, it would denote a transmutation of metals—the art possessed exclusively by his fraternity;—from that of a Buddhist, who believes in the doctrine of transmigration, it would mean to *transform*—that is, to assume after death that body for which his conduct in life had prepared his spirit, whether it were the body of an animal, reptile, insect, or another human being; hence the absolute necessity of some acquaintance with the speculative opinions of the author you are reading before you can understand his language.

By the same word, in connexion with *breath, vapour, spirit,* aerial transformations are expressed in contradistinction to a change of organised material substances; whence are derived various moral uses of the term, according to the sect adopting it, which are appropriated in pursuance of the senses already adverted to; as 教化 the effects of example, and the change of sentiment and manners produced by instruction; 風化 *funghwa* — 風 in Chinese, like רוח in Hebrew, meaning not only mind, but spirit, and moral influence — denotes, in allusion to the wind shaking the forests and the fields of grain, the change produced in the manners of the people by the good examples and instructions of superiors; wherefore moral writers use the term by itself to indicate the cause of repentance, a change of mind in the sense of *μετανόεω*, a change from a vicious to a virtuous course of life, from a barbarous condition to a state of civilization, and indeed,

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

from any kind of improper behaviour to that which is better; while, by the sect of Fŭh, it peculiarly denotes to turn from the world to the priesthood.

This word, which, preceded by a term denoting an efficient agent, implies the power to accomplish any moral or spiritual change, will appear to the Biblical student remarkably adapted to convey the doctrine of Holy Scripture on the renovation of the heart by the Sacred Spirit 神聖佩; while the philologist, perceiving that there is no sort of *oral* connexion between *hwa* and the sounds *jin* and *pe*, must admit that the combination and transitions, to which we have alluded, concur to elucidate the ideographic nature of the character wholly irrespective of sound.

There are two other terms composed of 匕 repeated 比 and of course originally of the same symbols as 化, only that in this case both are reversed. The modern uses, however, of 比 appear to have been derived from the meaning of the character, after it was appropriated, to denote *spoon*, without any reference to 人 the reverse of which it represents; since it means, "to compare one thing with another; to put in order; to classify; to collate; and, on epitaphs, to select and follow a virtuous course. It also signifies to provide; to prepare; to make; to approach near to; nearly related, or contiguously situated; to reach or extend to; to refer to; to equal; even; regularly placed; according with; corresponding to; close;" all which senses are said to be derived from the circumstance of "two spoons being uniformly arranged on a table;"* by which we are taught how the pictorial system became subservient to the ideo-

* See Morr. Dictionary, Part II. Vol. I. page 644.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

graphic, and how naturally the transition was made from the familiar image of a common domestic utensil, arranged in a certain position with another of its own kind, to the abstract notions of comparison, classification, collation, selection, approximation, contiguity, *accordance*, and if we bear in mind the original of the characters—two men —*consanguinity* also. I do not affirm that these significations are naturally suggested to the mind the moment the eye comes in contact with the symbol, or that such notions naturally flow from it in its original state; but now that they are educed, there is an apparent congruity and fitness by no means discreditable to the philological and philosophical genius of the Chinese, even when tried according to the European standard.

There is another character composed of the same two symbols, but placed in a different relative position, from which are derived significations of a nature quite contrary to the preceding; it is 北 *pih*, two men with their backs turned to each other, and signifies *perverse;* to turn away from; to oppose; to retreat; to run away. Now although these symbols as appropriately represent two spoons as two men, with the exception of the reversed form of one of them, yet the meaning of the character is evidently derived from the original idea—*man*. The usual modern sense of 北 is *north*, but on what principle this was added to its other senses does not appear. That these three characters 化 比 and 北, in their simple state, each representations only of two men, should be susceptible, from the single circumstance of *inverting* or *reversing* the form of one of them, of meanings so distinct, various, and even opposite, is a circumstance worthy of the philologist's most attentive consideration, while endeavouring

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

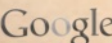
to explore the philosophy of the system to which they pertain.

There are several other compounds of 匕 and 比 which I cannot now illustrate: two more, however, not unworthy of notice, are 朼 *pe*, composed of 木 *mŭh*, wood, and 匕 a spoon, a kind of hook or fork, anciently used at funereal sacrifices, to raise victims out of the boiler, and place them in the vessel prepared for them; probably not dissimilar to the flesh-hook used by the servants of the Jewish priests, to extract their portion out of the pot in which pieces of meat were boiling for sacrifice. The other character to which I referred, 妣 compounded of 女 woman, and 比 — still, be it remembered, two men reversed — signifies a female ancestor; thus also exemplifying the ideographic system; while the former of the two characters seems to intimate a practice not improbably of Hebrew origin, or derived from a kindred source to that of many Jewish customs.

There is another class of symbols, whose etymological import illustrates their symbolic nature; while their moral application, from its coincidence with some striking passages of Scripture, is possessed of an interest, with readers of the Bible, unknown to the native Chinese. Take for example, 煉 to refine metals, compounded of 火 *ho*, fire, and 柬 *keen*, to separate; which exhibits both the act of separating the dross from the pure metal, and the agent (fire) by which that separation is effected; the moral use of which, collated with that beautiful passage, "He will sit as a refiner's fire," is illustrated in the phrase 煉人心* "to try men's hearts," by afflictive

* The sect of Taou say the two words 煉心 comprehend the whole of their religion.

events or prosperous circumstances—that is, to test human character by means of providential dispensations; phraseology which, though of heathen origin, discovers a knowledge of human nature scarcely to be expected without the aid of divine revelation; since it involves the sentiment that prosperity is equally available with adversity to ascertain the true state of the heart, and discriminate the good from the bad; just as the application of fire to metal in its original state separates the precious from the vile. Another symbol, in which 金 metal, occupies the place of 火 fire, is formed of *metal* and *to separate;* thus 鍊 is expressive not only of refining metals in the furnace, but of man undergoing a trial for the purpose of proving and benefiting him; whence it is used to denote experience, maturity, expertness; but whether in a good or bad sense depends upon the context; as 鍛鍊 *twan lëen,* would mean a magistrate expert at making out cases in a bad sense; or an officer of a penal court, who, by skill in the law, works or shapes a case to suit his purpose, and ruin his opponent. 鍊師 *leen sze,* a virtuous doctor of the sect of Taou, or alchymical philosophy. 鍊精 *lëen tsing;* the latter character signifying *essence, ether, subtle fluid, what is essential,* would mean made quite perfect by practice. The Chinese have a word of sacrificial import, remarkable for the indirect sanction it gives to the opinion that sacrifices of various kinds have been offered in China from the earliest periods. It has two forms, [illegible] 衈; the former composed of 歹 *tae,* perverse, opposed to, rebellious, and 耳 *urh,* the ear; the latter of this symbol and 血 *heuĕ,* blood. Its general meaning, to shed the blood of victims, is doubtless derived from its etymological import, of removing the feathers from the ear of a


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

bird, previously to the effusion of its blood in sacrifice; which is a ceremony indicative, by an expressive act, of opening the ear of the divinity to the prayer of the penitent, who makes this offering in the season of spring, whence it is styled the spring sacrifice for expelling diseases, and seems to proceed much on the same principle as the ancient Jewish prophets and priests did, who performed actions significant of the literal meaning of certain words, under which were couched emblems of the future occurrences and events they were divinely inspired to foretell. The prophet Ezekiel, for example, was commanded, in token of the future destruction of Jerusalem, to portray on a tile the city surrounded with implements of war and the apparatus usually employed in sieges, as emblems of its utter destruction; also to lie alternately on his left and on his right side for a certain period, cutting off his hair, weighing it in balances, and burning it with fire; thus suiting the action to impending circumstances, and most emphatically declaring the process to be employed in the accomplishment of the events.* Many examples of a similar kind occur in the Hebrew Scriptures. But the Jewish ceremony, most apposite to the Chinese, is that of presenting birds in sacrifice at the cleansing of the leper, which, while it darkly prefigured general blessings under a more exalted economy, also comprised, in the specific acts performed, an adumbration of special mercies then enjoyed by the grateful worshipper. Doubtless, the Chinese superstition can never in any respect compete with the ordinations of divine wisdom; still, the sacrificer in the act of stripping the feathers from the bird's neck, that the atoning

* Ezekiel iv. v. Leviticus xiv.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

blood may more freely flow, is a lively portraiture of the divinity, to whom the suppliant's prayer is addressed, bending a propitious ear, in token of his admission that every obstacle to the exercise of mercy towards the offender is now removed; and not unworthy, as *a mere emblem*, of a position among the types and shadows of ancient Judaism. The Chinese, as already intimated, make great symbolical use of the human frame and its important members, of which many characters were originally rude pictures, although now so modified as to leave no traces of the resemblance. The ancient form of 兒 *urh*, a child, may be called a *pictorial* representation, as it was intended to delineate an infant before the sutures of the cranium were completely ossified and joined; from which the modern form differs, but not much. Its figurative meanings, grafted on the primary one, are—"*feeble, unimportant, infantile, small in quantity,*" and others which that helpless state most fitly points out.

Urh 耳 is designed to represent the human ear, and any thing of a similar shape or use, as the ear of an animal, the handle of a cup, and a kind of *fungus* that grows from wood, 木耳 *muh urh*, literally *wood's ears*. Its figurative senses are—a *soft* ear, one ready to admit slanders, or credulous of evil tales; an *eating ear*, one that listens to instruction indiscriminately, and greedily devours every thing, without just perception or taste: but if the two characters form but one symbol 餌—its primary meaning will be, a bait to catch fish; its secondary one, a bait, in a moral sense, to seduce persons to evil, by operating on their cupidity. It also intimates distance in point of time; as an ear-grandson is a great grandson's grandson, a person descended from a distant ancestor, of whom he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

has only heard. The Chinese have a proverb, formed into an antithetic parallelism, which expresses their sense of the inferior properties of the ear to the eye, as an organ of mental perception: the second four characters, it will be seen, answer to the first four, 耳聞是虛 眼看是實; literally, "ear hears is empty, eye sees is solid;" that is, the report of an occurrence is unsubstantial, but the sight of it is a reality. The process of symbolic composition may be still further illustrated by the character *nëĕ* 聶 composed of three ears, which signifies a whisper addressed to the ear of another person; the *rationale* of which, I presume, is founded on the circumstance of one person communicating only with one ear of another; since four ears would have been the appropriate symbol to represent two persons talking together in the ordinary way: or it may be intended to denote numerous communications from ear to ear, without any respect to veracity. This character, with the addition of hand, thus, 攝, named *shĕ*, signifies to lead by the ear; and thence, to take, receive, direct, control, assume the general management of affairs, either on one's own account or for another person. The *ear* forms a part in the composition of words signifying *sound*, whether it be mere utterance of the human voice, or notes in music, tones and accent of the language, public proclamation, praise, celebrity, moral teaching or a verbal statement; and, what is singular, it is used also to specify a statement in writing. The symbol composed of *ear* and an *aperture*, or *quick*, 聰, denotes quickness of hearing, and facility of mental perception. *Urh*, the ear, also forms a part of words which signify to hear, to listen, to discriminate sounds, to comply with, to hear and determine causes as a criminal judge; the last of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

which, 聽 *ting*, when placed under 广 *yen*, a covering (thus, 廳), signifies a place where causes are heard, a court, a judicial apartment. Further illustrations might be adduced, if amplification were necessary; but the foregoing symbols prove, that while the Chinese regard the organs of sense as inlets of knowledge to the mind, they are careful to assign them a position in the system of morals corresponding to the office they sustain in the economy of nature, whenever they are required to assume a figurative sense. It is the same with the *eye*, the *mouth*, the *hands*, the *feet*, and other members of the human frame; all which, when introduced into the region of morals, of metaphysics, or of fancy, are invested with significations analogous to their import and use in the department of physics.

A few illustrations of the symbol 心 *heart*, whose original form was designed to represent the organ, will further show the various senses in which a character is used, and the methods of combination by which they are obtained. In the phrase for palpitation of the heart, 心心 *sin sin*, *tan tih* 忐忑, literally, heart ascending, heart descending—the former character, composed of 上 *shang*, to ascend, and heart, the latter of 下 *hea*, to descend, and heart—includes not only the idea of the physical action, but the figurative sense of an inconstant, timorous mind. The same symbol, in combination with others by which its sense is modified, expresses the various emotions, affections, and passions of the human bosom; as grief, joy, sorrow, anger, love, hatred, shame, fear, remorse, tranquillity, tenderness, compassion, benevolence, favour; these and numerous other characters representing intellectual and moral qualities—as perspi-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

cuity, thought, intelligence, inclination, opinion, motive, conscientiousness, virtue — are compounded of 心 *sin, the heart,* in which their diversified significations have a natural origin. The following are specimens of the method of composition: 恩 *gnan,* favour or grace, which consists of *yin* 因 *a cause,* and 心 *the heart,* intimating that free and sovereign favour is *the cause of the heart,* and has its source purely in kind feeling, of which the heart is the seat. 怒 *noo, anger,* is formed of 奴 *a slave,* and 心 *the heart;* but whether the precise idea is that of a mean and enslaved condition of the heart, does not appear, although it is most probable. 想 *seang, to think, to consider,* embraces the ideas of *heart* or *mind,* attached and tending to an object. 恥 *che, shame,* from *heart* and *ear,* because the ear is reddened and heated by a sense of shame. 憂 *yew, sorrow,* compounded of *head* and *heart,* whence it originally signifies grief that arises from one's own thoughts, and an anxious state of mind. 志 *che, the will,* embraces 心 *sin, the heart,* and 士 *a scholar, statesman, one who is complete,* which is formed of 一 *yih, one,* the *beginning* of numbers, and 十 *shih, ten,* which is a *perfect number* with the Chinese: thus the two numerals in their isolated state indicate the importance attached to numbers; while in conjunction with the *heart* they denote the point on which the mind turns, the inclination, the will — that which decides the movements of the mind. *E* 意 that which emanates from the will; ideas, thoughts, reflections, purpose, meaning, motive, opinion, sentiment, is compounded of 音 *yin, a sound,* and 心 *the heart.* But these examples must suffice; many characters, it is admitted, are formed of elements which have lost all apparent congruity, or at least all connexion

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

between their present meaning and the original signification of the several parts of which they are composed; but this circumstance arises from the arbitrary changes effected in the form of the character, whilst its meaning remains unaltered.

The connective or auxiliary particles in Chinese composition are few, and derived from words applicable to domestic matters, or material objects. 又 *yew* represents the *hand*, as if to take with the hand; hence the idea of *more*, and then *moreover*, *and further*, *still more*, are its chief meanings in composition. 且 *tseay*, which is defined, a particle ushering in a sentence, originally signified a vessel in which offerings were presented to the gods; the two perpendicular strokes of the character representing its feet, and the lower horizontal stroke the ground; but it is now used as an *expletive*, as an *expression of doubt*, and as an *inferential particle*; ideas that certainly have no apparent connexion with a sacrificial vessel, which the two sides and the base of the character were designed to represent, unless it be in the offering of additional ideas to the reader's notice, which is rather a bold metaphor. 而 *urh* is sometimes disjunctive, sometimes copulative; affirms a proposition at the beginning of a sentence, or in connexion with 已 *e*, at the close of it, intimates that the sense is exhausted: its original meaning is *whiskers*, the hair on the side of the cheek. The Chinese use numerous euphonic particles at the end of periods, purely to gratify the ear, which they designate *empty characters*, in contradistinction to *solid* characters, meaning thereby those which convey ideas. 乃 *nae*, "but," defined to be, a particle connecting the preceding with the following, is also used as a substantive verb. There are others of an

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

adversative and copulative nature, whose presence indicates a degree of refinement and taste. Particles, however, cannot be said to be common to the Chinese language on comparison of their frequency in European tongues; but when skilfully applied by an experienced scholar, their very infrequency augments their force and contributes to perspicuity. Transitions of thought in composition are usually made with the greatest abruptness, undistinguished by any closing or introductory particle, except where euphony seems to require a prolongation of sound after the sense is completed.

Articles, or characters to represent them, are not employed in Chinese with the same frequency as in European and some Asiatic languages. The indefinite article only occurs where the sense would be obscure without it, and then it is denoted by the numeral *one*. It would not be expressed in such a sentence as the following: "if a man were to do so," which would be rendered into Chinese 人若做這樣 "man if do this kind;" but if the sense were to be restricted to an individual, as in the phrase "to make an individual a rule for all the people in the world," it would then be expressed by 以一位人律天下之人 "take *one* person man give law heaven below's man." The definite article is represented in those sentences which require the mind to be directed to a specific circumstance or object, as 吾聞其語矣未見其人也 "I have heard *the* saying, but never saw *the* person;" meaning, "I have heard such a thing talked of, but never saw the individual who could do it;" or 不任其位不謀其政 "not in the station, nor plan the rule," words by which Confucius expressed his determination not to interfere with

government measures when he was out of office. These two sentences are constructed of parallelisms, the force of which, having the same number of characters in each part, is considerably augmented by the relative position of 其 equivalent to "the." In the former, 其言舌 "the saying," is opposed to 其人 "the man;" in the latter 其位 "the office," to 其政 "the government." 其 is also used for he, his, she, hers, it, its. Gender, number, and inflections being alike unknown to Chinese words, the sexes, plurality of persons or things, are distinguished by the addition of some separate character, expressive of male, or female, or by some numeral. There is a class of characters designated numerals commonly prefixed to different substantives, in the colloquial medium that may be thought to resemble the indefinite article in English. *Ko* 個 is a very common one, and may be used with numerous characters of different significations, although properly each noun ought to have its own numeral prefixed; as 一本書 "one volume book;" 一隻船 *yih chih chuen*, a ship; 一個人 *yih ko jin*, a man. Here 本隻個 are numerals, merely used for the sake of explicitness in conversation, or in the style of writing most nearly approaching thereto; but not necessarily required in composition.

These direct examples of the nature and power of the language must suffice, as opportunities of incidental illustration will occur during the discussion of Chinese theories and doctrines. But having said so much on the written symbols, which are not necessarily connected with any phonetic system, it behoves me now to state more particularly the characteristics of the oral medium. It has been already shown that each character is mono-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

syllabic, and that the same sound is attached to many different forms and ideas. To countervail, in some degree, this defect of their oral system, the Chinese have adopted a method of intonation which consists in appropriating a peculiar tone of voice to a specific word, to alter its signification. There are four tones 平 上 去 入 —the *even*, the *ascending*, the *departing*, the *entering*, generally called *even* and *side* tones, and subdivided by some scholars into upper and lower ascending, upper and lower even, upper and lower departing, upper and lower entering tones; but, excepting the *ping-shing*, these minute distinctions are not carried out, in the general language of China, with such precision as in some local dialects, of which the Fŭh-këën and Canton may be cited as specimens. It may appear singular that the well-educated Mandarin should not discriminate sounds so exquisitely as the untutored inhabitant of the province; but the apparent difficulty admits of an easy solution, when it is considered that variety of intonation was originated not to promote the pleasures of harmony, but to increase the facilities of oral intercourse, which, amidst so many syllables of the same sound, must needs be confused and uncertain to a person unacquainted with the symbols: for example, the word *tëën* means *heaven*, *field*, *fear*, *to plough*, according to the tone of voice in which it is uttered; but if the written form of each idea— 天 *heaven*, 田 *a field*, 悿 *fear*, 佃 *to plough* — be present to the mind, all is plain, even though the proper tone be neglected. Now, where a person cannot read, it is of the utmost importance for him to learn to discriminate and express *tëën*, or any other word, so as to convey the different ideas of which the varied intonation renders it

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

susceptible. It is the duty of every native teacher to instruct his pupils in the proper tones of each character when they begin to read; the progress of whom he facilitates by affixing to it the following marks, or accents, indicative of the tone, ○ ∧ – — ◡ , as exemplified in the written symbols above; but these oral distinctions necessarily require the living voice to render them intelligible, except the last ◡, which may be expressed by *tëë*, with the accent on the right side of the character, thus 鐵 which, although the sound of *n* is not heard, the Chinese classify with *tëën:* hence all words ending in *an*, *ang*, *en*, *euen*, *in*, *ing*, *un*, *ung*, which are characterized by the four tones, have their corresponding entering tones, which we should express by *ă ĕ ĭh ŏ ŭh*, annexed; as *wan* wă, *shen* shĕ, *tsin* tsĭh, *leuen* leŏ, *chung* chŭh. The only additional variety of sounds consists in an aspirate between the consonants *k p t ts* and the following vowel, as *k'e p'e t'e* uttered with a forcible breathing, to distinguish it from *ke pe te*, similar distinctions subsisting between all words having a vowel after either of these consonants, as *k'ung* and *kung*, *p'ing* and *ping*, *t'an* and *tan*, *k'ëën* and *këën*. *K* is often confounded with *tch*, in the northern parts of the empire. All the different words and tones of the Chinese language, by which I mean the *names* of the symbols, how numerous soever they may be — and they have been computed at 40,000 — do not amount to more than 1,320 in the general language of the country, even including the division of the *ping shing*. According to Dr. Morrison's arrangement of the sounds, in Roman letters, the number of syllables is 411: of these, 108 are of the *jih-shing*, and terminate in a short vowel or the letter *h*; if, therefore, we subtract this

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

number from 411, and multiply the remainder, 303, by four, we shall have 1,212; to which must be added the 108, to give the true result of the number of distinct tones applicable to all the symbols of thought in the Chinese language; the only additional variety of sound consisting in the aspirated words, which are not many, and the substitution of a different tone to indicate that the word is a verb. The system of intonation is of comparatively modern invention. It was devised to give greater variety and precision to the oral language, which accounts for its cultivation and extension among children of the rural districts, who acquire it with remarkable accuracy, without knowing the symbols, from, it is presumed, early care in disciplining the ear to nice and (to foreigners) almost imperceptible differences of sound, on which depends to so great a degree the correct apprehension and discrimination of ideas. But, after all, with whatever success the tones are cultivated, it will be evident to the European scholar that the oral medium of the Chinese can never pretend to oratorical power in any degree equal to that of the languages of Greece and Rome, although they themselves speak of the falling flowers of eloquence, as sometimes characteristic of their native oratory. The short, abrupt sounds, intermingled with aspirates and harsh cadences, produce a monotonous and unpleasing effect on the ear; while the perpetual recurrence of the same monosyllables renders it necessary, for the sake of effect, to use many more words in speaking than the number of characters which even a perspicuous style of writing requires. To draw still more accurately the distinction between the powers and properties of the written and oral mediums of China, it will

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

be necessary to adduce a few examples peculiar to each, which will also illustrate the difference generally between a symbolic and an alphabetic tongue. *Mankind* is expressed in writing by 世人 *world men*, in speaking by 世間上的人 *world within upon's men*. The question, *where are you going to?* is sufficiently expressed, when written, by the phrase 何處而去 *what place and go?* but to be understood in speaking would require both more numerous and more familiar characters, as 你到那裡往去 *you to what place proceed go?* To convey the idea, *It is now many years since I saw him*, 數年未見他 *numerous years not yet see him*, would be abundantly explicit in writing; while in conversation it would be desirable to say, 好多年我沒有會遇他 *good many years I not have met with him*. For *excessively good*, 絕好 would suffice, if written; while the same idea is expressed in the spoken idiom by 了不得這麼好 *perfectly unattainable this kind good*. It is evident, from these and other specimens previously adduced, that were it not for the symbolic nature of Chinese, which excludes an alphabet, and necessarily requires each character to stand alone, alike detached from the preceding and the following one in visible form, the oral language would long ere this have become polysyllabic. In its present state, where two or three syllables falling on the ear, and producing no other impression on the mind than a single symbol would convey to the eye, the words, according to European distinctions, would be called dissyllabic or trisyllabic.

It is probably in a similar way, by the union of several monosyllables, each expressive of a distinct idea, that the very long words which are found in some ancient and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

modern languages originally occurred. It is remarked by a Sanscrit scholar,* on the comparative identity of the Chinese with the Sanscrit—"I believe it is admitted, by the learned, that a similar structure in alphabets is one test of the derivation of one language from another; and if so, the Chinese language is evidently derived from the Sanscrit; for whilst it has borrowed its arrangement from the Sanscrit, it has dispensed with some of the letters." A comparative table is then given of the Sanscrit alphabet and the supposed Chinese alphabet romanized; of which, though I have studied the Chinese language many years, I never before heard. It is due to the author of the Grammar to state that his authority on this point is the "Calcutta Christian Observer, for September, 1835;" and it is also due to the Chinese symbols to affirm that they never had an alphabet, and will never need one; for the moment the phonetic system of conveying ideas by words reducible to certain primary sounds, usually called an alphabet, comes into general operation in China, its symbolic language disappears; just as the Egyptian hieroglyphs ceased to be known in Egypt when the Coptic alphabet gained the ascendancy. The peculiarity of this error lies in the circumstance of its having originated in the capital of India, a portion of whose territory is contiguous to China, and consequently favourable to the acquisition of correct information on the nature of its language. I see no way of accounting for it, without imputing inexcusable carelessness to its author, except on the supposition that he has confounded the Chinese with the Manshur Tartar, which is an alphabetic language,

* M. W. Woollaston, Esq., Government Sanscrit College, Calcutta, in the Preface to his Sanscrit Grammar, pp. 4, 5.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

spoken by the present Imperial family, and may perhaps bear some affinity to the Sanscrit. It is, however, remarkable that some of the names of the Sanscrit letters—such as *cha, ta, sa, sha, ya, ma,* and (if the *h* inserted be merely an aspirate) *chha, tha, pha*—are exactly the same in sound as some of the Chinese monosyllables; that is, the names of its symbols, of which I adduce the following: 査 *cha,* to investigate; 大 *ta,* great; 鈒 *să,* a spear or lance; 灑 *sha,* to sprinkle water; 牙 *ya,* a tooth; 馬 *ma,* a horse; 茶 *chha,* tea; 他 *tha,* or *t'a,* he; [illegible] *pha,* or *p'a,* the appearance of a tuft of hair, and connected with [illegible] *na* (both a Sanscrit and a Chinese sound), dishevelled hair. Several other symbols, of the same sounds and of different meanings, might have been added to these, which, be it remembered, are taken promiscuously from the language in general, to which they sustain no elementary relation in the slightest degree analogous to what subsists between an alphabet and the tongue of which it is the basis.

If the Sanscrit words were monosyllabic in their primary state, what are called *clusters* may have been formed by the connexion of these words in different numbers, to indicate that all the ideas which they represent were to be grouped together in one class, distinguished by a line drawn over the letters of which they are composed, from the first to the last. According to Mr. Woollaston, there are three of these clusters in the following sentence, indicative of the *subject,* while the *attribute* and the *object* are each expressed by one word: "May he who holds a discus in his hand (one cluster), going to the mountain of battle against Kungsa (another cluster), reeling like a drunken elephant (a third cluster), *preserve you:*" and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

these three clusters constitute the nominative, or subject, to the sentence, of which *preserve* is the attribute, and *you* the object. Not being a Sanscrit scholar, I cannot ascertain whether each separate idea, of which the clusters are composed, was originally expressed by a monosyllable. In another specimen, to exemplify the construction of a sentence in poetry, as well as the mode of clustering words, the original is represented in Roman letters, thus: "Prajánámeba bhrityartham satábhayobalim agrahit. Sahasragun, amutsrashthumadattehi rasán rabih:" and in this way, from some Chinese terms *romanized*, the language would appear, to Europeans, not only polysyllabic, but to consist of words of extraordinary length. The Chinese term for *mankind*, expressed in Roman letters joined together, would be "shekeenshangteihjin," only two letters shorter than the longest of the above quoted Sanscrit words; for *philosopher*, according to European notions, it would be necessary to use a still longer cluster, "chachăteĕntejinwuhchelechay." The difference between the two languages is, that the Sanscrit scholar has elementary *sounds*, to which these long compounds are reducible; whereas a Chinese could proceed no further than to analyze the separate *ideas* of which each combination is formed, whether addressed to him *vivâ voce*, or written in his own character; as "philosopher," which he would render 查察天坤人物之理者 "he who investigates the principles of heaven, earth, man, and things." It is not, therefore, at all probable that the Chinese has been derived from the Sanscrit; unless it be admitted, by those who uphold this theory, that one of the languages has since undergone a radical and total transformation. The Chinese speak of the language of a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

region named *Fan*, which is generally supposed to be in Thibet, as the source of a system of syllabic spelling, formed by joining the initial sound of one character to the final of another, to indicate the name of a third; for example, to convey the sound of 聖 *shing*, the two characters 視 *she*, and 廷 *ting*, might be employed; *i. e. sh* of the former, and *ing* of the latter, which together make *shing*; but from the unaptness of the Chinese, both in teaching and acquiring pronunciation by this method, though adopted in Kang-he's Lexicon, it is evidently not an original part of their language, but a subsequent adjunct, quite incongruous with its native principles; the ancient and still prevailing mode being to represent the sound of a character, supposed to be unknown, by one that is well known; for instance, as 奰 *pe*, "large and robust," is not in common use, its sound might be taught by 比 *pe*, "to compare:" and therefore, although the syllabic-spelling system was in all probability derived from the Sanscrit, which is generally thought to be meant by the language of Fan, and though there is an identity of sound between some Sanscrit and Chinese words, yet the idea of arguing thence for a corresponding alphabet is not only erroneous, but preposterous. As to the true origin of the Chinese language, but little is advanced, by native writers, on which any reliance can be placed. It is said, by the Chinese, that, in high antiquity, they had a language without a system of writing. If this be correct, their present graphic mode of communication was not carried with them when they immigrated into China; and it would afford matter for interesting investigation to the inquisitive philologist, to know where they obtained their vocables, and which

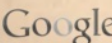
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of the provincial dialects now existing in the empire approaches the nearest in verbal affinity to their primary tongue; while withal some new light might be thrown on the origin of their present symbols: for if they were really framed by themselves, as they allege, words previously possessed must, to a considerable extent, have been abandoned, and new names invented to each succeeding series of symbols. But is it at all probable that they once had an alphabet, which they permitted to fall into desuetude, and then erected on its ruins a mode of writing distinguished, not by its *vocal*, but *ideal* properties, to the forms of which they appropriated some of the names of their old phonetic system? The reverse of this would, indeed, be the natural process, as it is the usual mode of transition in languages which have undergone great changes. An example occurs in the Coptic alphabet, formed by adding seven of the original hieroglyphs of Egypt to the letters of the Greek alphabet: probably another instance may be found in the Hebrew alphabet; since, from the shape of many of its letters, there can be little doubt they were originally framed on the principles of the pictorial system, which was afterwards modified into the present alphabetic form. It would at any rate appear, from the similarity of the Coptic alphabet to the Grecian, rather than to the Hebrew, that the ancient language of Egypt had not been alphabetic during the time the Hebrews dwelt there; otherwise there would have been affinities between the two languages, which evidently do not subsist, and no necessity for a new alphabet, like the Coptic, which obtains all its similarity to the Hebrew through the medium of the Greek, whence it was derived; a fact which affords the strongest pre-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

sumptive evidence, that at the time it was formed, the Egyptian system of writing was hieroglyphic; unless we can suppose the existence of two alphabets to one language probable, or the necessity of devising an alphabet when one was already in existence. But this point will receive further consideration when the comparative properties of the Chinese and the Egyptian languages are discussed.

The grand reason, as it should seem, why the Chinese tongue has not partaken of the changes incident to language in general, is the steady and unalterable character of its symbols; which has also tended to give that appearance of uniformity to the political and moral aspect of the people, which a minute acquaintance with their history shows to have subsisted amidst numerous and great political convulsions. If it be said, the general application of this argument is opposed by facts, since Egypt—assuming for the present that her ancient language was symbolical—is a monument of the insufficiency of an hieroglyphic language to preserve her in the same state, it should be remembered that the geographical position of Egypt, exposed to the incursions of surrounding nations, and especially to the whole force of Grecian and Roman influence when their military, philosophic, and scientific glory was in its greatest splendour, is quite sufficient to constitute a broad line of distinction between her and China; which, though the subject of frequent invasions and distressing internal conflicts, has, while succumbing under the power of her adversaries, commanded their homage to her institutions, customs, and language, which her conquerors have not only failed to eradicate or modify, but have even adopted and perpetu-


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ated with whatever other sentiments and theories they could ingraft on the native stock. The Buddhism of India, with its religious and superstitious rites, the Mahometanism of Arabia, with her mathematical and astronomical science, the military prowess of the Tartars, though successful in subjugating the whole empire to their dominion, could not subvert one important institution, change materially the habits and customs of the people, supersede the use of the native tongue, modify its existing characteristics, or in anywise diminish the prevalence of the written symbols by the substitution of their own language; although since the accession of the present dynasty, all the honours and emoluments of the empire have been at its disposal, accompanied with ceaseless efforts to render Tartar influence supreme. Two reasons, therefore, may be assigned for such a state of political existence, after an experiment of three hundred years: the first is, the innate and rooted aversion to change, which is at this day strikingly characteristic of the Chinese; numbers of whom suffered death at the time of the conquest, because they would not submit to the Tartar custom of shaving the head, which, after much opposition, was at length imposed on the whole empire; the second reason is to be found in the superior systems of Chinese polity, both national and social, compared to those of the Tartars, and the facility with which the existing manners and institutions of a large empire might be adopted, when any attempt at their subversion by a mere handful of men would not only be attended with immense difficulties, but probably place in jeopardy all previous acquisitions. Under such circumstances, a statesman endued with sagacity to perceive, on the one hand, the dangers that

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

beset him, and on the other, the advantages accruing to his own followers, from the modifying influence of literature and civilization, would certainly adopt the alternative chosen by the Tartar chieftain, of sacrificing personal feeling to state policy. But if China had been overrun by an enemy of superior attainments in science, like Greece or Rome or England, and assiduous in introducing its own laws and institutions, it is not impossible but their language might have undergone some modification similar to that of Egypt; albeit no sound statesman, it is presumed, would hazard an attempt to change a language diffused in thousands of distinct treatises throughout hundreds of millions of people, enthusiastically attached to its unique and beautiful symbols; which, by early instruction and constant use, had become identified with their very existence as a distinct race, specially favoured of Heaven with a medium of communication, divine in its origin, felicitous in its daily influences, and eternally glorious in its happy results; for such are the properties with which the Chinese invest their graphic system.

Although splendid specimens of the ancient hieroglyphs of Egypt have been preserved during many ages on pyramids, tombs, and other monuments accessible to ingenious and learned men, by whom they have been diligently examined, these venerable inscriptions may still be considered as involved in profound mystery. Without undervaluing previous researches in Egyptian literature, it cannot but be obvious to the careful student of oriental learning, that no system has yet been framed sufficiently philosophical in its principles, and coherent in its several parts, to elucidate the practical use and primary signifi-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

cation of those symbols. Conjectures have been framed on these points, and attempts made to support them on the grounds of consistency and probability; but evidently without success. It was formerly supposed, not without reason, perhaps, considering how intimately ignorance and superstition have always been allied, that these signs were known only to the priesthood, by whom they were invented, for the purpose of securing sanctity to their profession, and unlimited power over the mass of the people. Sufficient importance, however, was not attached to the fact, that a powerful community, existing in a high state of mental culture from remote antiquity, would not submit to the same hierarchical despotism as undisciplined tribes who had never participated the humanizing influences of political and moral elevation; although it must be conceded that the supposed depositaries of super-human knowledge, affecting man's future destiny, would necessarily acquire extensive dominion over his reasoning faculties. But ideas, apparently more in accordance with the original design of the symbols, have at length prevailed; insomuch that these ancient and curious modes of communicating thought are now looked upon, not as the exclusive language of a privileged class, but as having been the current medium of written intercourse among almost all the people at some unknown period of their greatest prosperity. It would highly gratify every one anxious to explore the original sources of language, and to investigate the most ancient mediums of thought, to hold mental intercourse with the authors of those inscriptions, whose sentiments have been so long shrouded in impenetrable darkness, the external symbols of which still exist in a high state of preservation; and, as a natural consequence, to analyze

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the principles on which those isolated hieroglyphics were once digested into a consistent and practicable system.

I must not be understood to presume upon any originality in the remarks I am about to offer on Egyptian hieroglyphics and literature; but having ascertained, with some degree of precision, the origin and character of the Chinese tongue, my object now is to inquire whether there be any resemblance between it and the Egyptian; and if there be, whether, on comparison of the original forms and sources of Chinese and Egyptian symbols, new light may not thereby be reflected on the principles of symbolical language in general; and whether from considering the origin, process of composition, and metaphorical use of certain existing hieroglyphics, special relationship did not originally subsist between these and the symbols of China.

In prosecuting these inquiries, it will be both instructive and interesting to trace the similitudes employed by each country, not only as descriptive of material objects, but as applied in their moral sense to political institutions, national superstitions, hereditary customs, prevailing manners and sentiments, domestic habits, and mental discipline.

The questions then are, what agreement subsists between the principles on which the two languages are based? and are there any general characteristics of similitude sufficiently important to identify these systems of writing, as emanating from kindred sources, framed on one plan, and subjected to similar laws of application? To these inquiries, I should decidedly reply in the affirmative; because, from the testimony of Horapollo, several of whose statements are confirmed by existing monumental inscrip-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

tions, the Egyptian symbols were designed to portray to the eye some striking sentiment, between which and its hieroglyphic representative there was a natural or conventional union, without reference to any phonetic system whatever; although arbitrary sounds attached to such ideographic signs would necessarily be employed in some way to indicate foreign words and proper names, agreeably to the practice of the Chinese.

Among the European literati distinguished for their cultivation of this branch of philology, Dr. Thomas Young, an English physician, and Mons. Champollion, a French gentleman, have the pre-eminence. Without entering into detail, I may be allowed to give a general outline of their respective systems; from both which, facts stated by original writers on the subject have led me to dissent. Champollion, supposing that he rightly understood the Chinese system, would deny any identity between it and the Egyptian; although a comparison of the 864 signs, furnished and classified by himself, for the purpose of illustrating the Egyptian language, with the 214 Chinese symbols, or heads of classes, which I have explained above, appears to me not only to indicate points of striking resemblance, but to furnish evidence of mutual affinity in the origin of those two ancient tongues. The classification by Champollion to which I allude, is as follows:—

1. Heavenly bodies; sun, moon, stars, firmament, &c.
2. The human species under various circumstances of sex, age, rank, and every position of which the body is susceptible in motion or at rest.
3. Members of the human body.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

4. Four-footed wild beasts, including the lion, panther, hippopotamus, rhinoceros, hare, antelope, monkey, &c.

5. Domestic quadrupeds, consisting of the ox, cow, calf, ram, pig, camel, &c.

6. Members of animal bodies.

7. Birds and parts of their bodies; among which we observe more frequently the quail, eagle, vulture, night-raven, swallow, lapwing, goose, stork, many species of water-fowl, and wild fowl.

8. Fishes which live in the Nile.

9. Reptiles, and parts of their bodies, including the frog, lizard, crocodile, asp, serpent, viper, adder.

10. Insects.

11. Vegetables, plants, flowers, fruits.

12. Buildings, and edifices.

13. Household goods, and works of art.

14. Coverings for the feet, armour, head dresses, sceptres, ensigns, ornaments.

15. Tools, and utensils of different kinds.

16. Vases, cups, &c.

17. Geometrical figures.

18. Fantastic shapes; such as the human body united to heads of divers animals, to serpents, vessels, mountains, or the legs of a man; birds and reptiles to the human head, and quadrupeds to the heads of birds.

A comparison of these hieroglyphics with the recognized roots of the Chinese tongue and numerous other symbols which may be considered in the light of primitives, not only presents striking resemblances in detail, but shows what is infinitely more important in this question, that both systems have been constructed on the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

same general principles; and that the apparent origin and design of Egyptian hieroglyphics have been consentaneous with the sources and objects of the Chinese symbols. The following subjects embrace points of mutual coincidence: — Heaven, with its phenomena; the human frame, and its different members, in varied positions; animals, wild and domestic; parts of animal bodies; birds, fishes, reptiles, insects, vegetables, plants, flowers, and fruits; buildings, furniture, works of art, armour, ornaments, tools, utensils, instruments of agriculture and of music, vases, cups. But while strong affinity in general is apparent, differences exist, which mark the Egyptian system as the more simple. The Chinese, including both concrete and abstract terms with what grammarians of alphabetic languages would call verbs, indicates considerable philosophic judgment in classifying mental operations, and great practical wisdom in the significant symbols by which they are represented. In illustration of this remark, I would direct the reader to the latter part of the previous arrangement of the Chinese radicals, which are, however, incidental deviations in the carrying out of the systems that do not affect the grand principles. The language of the Chinese is intimately blended with the philosophical systems on which they attempt to account for the origin of the universe; and hence it is important, in the elucidation of isolated symbols, to ascertain, if possible, the exact nature of such metaphysical and moral theories. Now do not the Egyptian hieroglyphics require a very similar process of illustration? Is it probable that the whole mystery of so complicated a medium of communication could ever be unravelled by the mere phonetic coincidence supposed to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

subsist between five or six of its symbols and a proper name in another language? for it may be confidently asserted, that not any of the discoveries, predicted by the inventors of this theory, have yet crowned their efforts. But what, it may be asked, is the nature of the evidence adduced to favour the phonetic system? The whole of the results on which the credit of the theory is staked, are these:—that in consequence of a certain mutilated inscription found on a block of black basalt at Rosetta, the word Ptolemaeus is supposed to be indicated by the Egyptian hieroglyphics next in order to the Greek, in honour of Ptolemy Epiphanes; that these letters are of three kinds—the hieroglyphic, or sacred letters; the enchorial, or letters of the country; and the Grecian: and that the recurrence in this name of certain Egyptian signs of a particular form and order sufficiently proves the characters engraven on the ancient monuments of Egypt to have been alphabetic signs; so that a conclusion of the utmost magnitude is drawn from premises not well established by primary evidence, and destitute of all concurring collateral testimony. But what at once throws suspicion on the soundness of this theory, is avowed disagreement between its chief advocates. M. Champollion and Dr. Young, limited as their subject is, differ both on the interpretation of the symbols, and the nature of their elementary properties; the former of whom considers them as indicative of simple sounds like our own letters; the latter as bearing the complex character of words and letters. Champollion says, "I attempt to demonstrate, first, that my hieroglyphic alphabet is applicable to royal hieroglyphic inscriptions of all ages; secondly, that the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

discovery of the phonetic alphabet of hieroglyphics is the true key to the whole hieroglyphic system; thirdly, that the ancient Egyptians employed it in all ages to represent alphabetically the sounds of the words of their spoken language; fourthly, that all the hieroglyphic inscriptions are for the most part composed of signs purely alphabetic, and such as I have determined them; fifthly, I will seek to understand the nature of the different kinds of characters employed simultaneously in the hieroglyphic texts; sixthly, I will attempt to deduce from all these propositions once proved, the general theory of an hieroglyphic system, supported by numerous applications: this theory will be altogether new, and I certainly dare to affirm it, since it will result from facts. It will give us access to the understanding of the subject and its contents, often the whole mass of a sufficiently large number of hieroglyphic inscriptions; and by successive labours which it will henceforth render practicable, conceived nevertheless and directed according to its own principles, it will soon give us a full and complete acquaintance with all hieroglyphic writings."

The difference between the two theories is thus stated by Champollion:—"According to Dr. Young, the Egyptians would have had a sort of mixed ideographico-syllabic alphabet, almost like the Chinese, who transcribe foreign words into their language;* but according to my system the Egyptians transfer foreign proper names to their own language by a method entirely alphabetical, similar to

* The author ought to have said, who represent the words of foreign languages as closely as possible by the monosyllabic sounds attached to their own symbols.

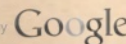
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

that of the Hebrews, Phœnicians, and their neighbours the Arabs." Again,* "In concluding this long discussion, by what embraces the general nature of the Egyptian phonetic system, it is manifest, as I think, that Dr. Young, in attempting to analyze only two proper names, thought, and wished to prove, that the ancient Egyptians transcribed foreign proper names by employing characters which, although ideographic in their nature, would express on these occasions alone, syllables, dissyllables, and simple letters."

Now with all deference to our author, this is very nearly what I conceive to have been the method of using the hieroglyphics of Egypt; and it is remarkable that Dr. Young, not knowing the Chinese language, should have adopted, for the elucidation of Egyptian signs, a theory in some respects congenial to its present practice, while, without perceiving his inconsistency, he still clung to another directly opposed to it.† "No effort," he says, "however determined or persevering, had (*i. e.* prior to his first efforts) been able to discover any alphabet which could fairly be said to render the inscriptions in general at all like what was required to make its language intelligible Egyptian, although most of the proper names seemed to exhibit a tolerable agreement with the forms of letters indicated by Mr. Akerblad,—a coincidence, indeed, which might be found in Chinese, or in any other character not alphabetical, if they employed words of the simplest sounds for writing compound proper names."

But let us hear what objections the ingenious Frenchman interposes. He says, "On my part, I am justified

* Ch. i. p. 36. † Page 18, Young.


Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

in thinking that I have demonstrated the phonetic system of the Egyptians to be infinitely more simple; and that this people have transcribed proper names and foreign words by means of a regular alphabet of which each element is equivalent to a simple vowel or consonant. 'The square block □ and the semi-circle (says Dr. Young) answer invariably in all the manuscripts to characters which resemble P and T;' while I have never seen in any of the numerous manuscripts *hieratiques*, which I have studied, that it has been expressed by a character resembling the P of M. Akerblad: its invariable form is that which is engraved on my first plate, No. 4, made, as I have also found, like the first symbol in the name of Ptolemy, in many popular *papyri*. I have maintained that the P of the hieroglyphic name of Cleopatra, was also expressed by the very same character—the square and that the segment of the sphere was the consonant T; first, because in all the hieroglyphical passages the feminine article of the Egyptian language T is rendered by this figure; and, secondly, because it expresses the consonant T, in a multitude of Greek or Roman names, represented by hieroglyphics. 'The following character,' continues Dr. Young, 'which appears to be a kind of knot, is not essentially necessary, being often omitted in the sacred character, and always in the enchorial.' I am ignorant on what grounds the learned Englishman felt himself justified in stating, that this third sign of the hieroglyphical name of Ptolemy was *not essentially necessary*, and why he has excused himself from investigating its power; however, I can testify, that I never found it omitted but once* in the numerous columns of Ptolemy,

* Inscrip. de Rosette, texte hiéroglyphique, ligne 14, et par un oubli du graveur.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

drawn on the Egyptian monuments; only this character is sometimes transposed and put after the *lion;* and the corresponding popular character (plate 1, No. 4) ꝗ so far from being always omitted, is, on the contrary, always *expressed;* but the learned Englishman believed that this character formed part of the symbol which precedes it. In my system the hieroglyphic in form of a knot, which Dr. Young considers useless, and which appears to me to be a fruit or a flower with its stalk bending, has been, on the contrary, recognized as the symbol of the vowel O; since it is in effect also the fourth sign of the hieroglyphic name of Cleopatra.

"'The Lion,' says Mr. Young, 'corresponds to *Lo* of Akerblad, a lion being always expressed by a like character in the manuscripts, or an oblique line crossed, representing the body, and a perpendicular line the tail; this was, probably, read not *Lo*, but O L E.' It is evident that the learned Englishman, having only proceeded to the fourth sign of the hieroglyphic name of Ptolemy, was already obliged to read the name of which the two first elements appeared to him alphabetical P and T, and (suppressing the third sign without reason) supposing that the fourth, the lion, is no more an alphabetic sign like the two first, but a dissyllabic character, attributing to it the power O L E. Such a use of symbols so different in their nature would, in my opinion, be very surprising.

"For my part, observing that the lion the third sign of the hieroglyphic name of Ptolemy, was like the second sign of the hieroglyphic name of Cleopatra, I understood this symbol to be simply the sign of the consonant L."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Again: Champollion says, "I have assigned to these two feathers ⸗ the power of the Greek η, because I considered the two feathers, or rather leaves, as a complex character, formed of the reduplication of the simple leaf, which is a short vowel. The two feathers correspond with sufficient regularity, indeed, in the hieroglyphic names, to two Greek diphthongs AI, EI, or to double vowels AI, IO, and in the first relation this hieroglyphic group has the greater analogy with the epsilon redoubled, E E, on the more ancient Greek inscriptions. The two feathers answer also sometimes to the iota of some Greek or Roman names; a new motive for transcribing this group, apart from its nature, by the η of the Greeks, to which the ancient pronunciation approaches as certainly as that of our T."

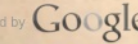
"The curved stroke," continues Dr. Young, "which probably signifies *great*, was read *osch* or *os*. It remains for me to show that the idea of *great* is never expressed in the hieroglyphic text of Rosetta by this curved line, but rather by a swallow placed on the character *mouth*, grouped, according to Dr. Young, to signify diadem."

As my object is not to furnish a history of the controversy between Dr. Young and M. Champollion, but to develop the principles of a system totally distinct and independent, I have perhaps quoted sufficient to mark the properties of their respective theories. I shall now proceed to adduce reasons for thinking that the Egyptian hieroglyphics were not designed to be phonetic, but symbolical; that is, that they originally constituted a series of figures, representing living and tangible objects, and thereby became a medium through which ideas, abstract or concrete, simple or complex, are conveyed to the mind irrespective of sound.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The earliest existing treatises of the language do not extend higher than the fifth century before Christ; while those now quoted as authorities are to be found, principally, among the Greek writers of a later date, of whom the chief are Herodotus, Eratosthenes, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Plutarch, Philostratus, and Porphyry. Manetho, an Egyptian priest, who, it is said, wrote a history of his native country, by order of Ptolemy Philadelphus, which is now lost, had inserted some remarks in it on the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Chaeremon, another Egyptian historian, wrote on the same subject. Horapollo, whose æra is undetermined by the learned, is supposed to have been an Egyptian by birth, who wrote in his native tongue the Hieroglyphica, whence it was translated into Greek. This work contains a great deal of curious and interesting matter on the origin of the Egyptian symbols, but differs from itself, in the estimation of some critics,* so much as to have induced the opinion that it is not all genuine. Sufficient internal evidence, however, remains, especially when its theories are compared with the hieroglyphics on the ancient monuments of Egypt, to show that a great part of it is the production of a native, well versed in the system of writing originally prevalent among his countrymen. Moreover, his account of the origin and formation of the hieroglyphics, harmonizes so clearly with certain treatises on the Chinese symbols, by learned natives, whose system is known to be both natural and practical, that this simple circumstance of undesigned coincidence pleads most powerfully for the genuineness of a large portion of the Hieroglyphica. It is conceded by Champollion, that any attempt to deny the ideographic nature

* Fabricius, for example.

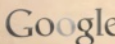

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of the Egyptian characters is preposterous; for he says, "It will not be permitted at this day to any one to allege, as persons have formerly dared to do, that the hieroglyphics served only for the purpose of ornamenting the edifices on which they are engraven, and that they were not invented with a view to portray ideas."* It is surprising with this admission that there should still be, in his theory, a tenacious adherence to the alphabetic system, to which it is not consentaneous. The misconception of the learned writer on this point, if I may presume so far, seems to have sprung from a previous conviction, that proper names could not be transferred without an alphabet; and hence, instead of connecting together the group of hieroglyphs on the Rosetta stone as *words*—the only proper method of analyzing foreign names in a symbolical tongue—the author endeavoured to accommodate each sign to an elementary class of sounds totally unknown to the language. The very circumstance of the names of these signs being lost, affords presumptive evidence that they were never intended to answer the purpose of an alphabet; and this opinion may be satisfactorily elucidated from analogous properties of the Chinese tongue.

If it be granted that the characters included within the lines are the representatives of a foreign name, I would ask, why each of those forms may not indicate a *word* as well as a *letter*. The Chinese inclose their characters in a similar way to designate a *country;* for example, England would be spelled by the characters 英吉利 (*ying-keih-le*) inclosed in a parallelogram; or they would put a 口 *mouth*, at the side of each symbol composing

* Page 250.

the name thus: 𠸄咭唎 to indicate that the characters so distinguished were intended only for sound; implying also, as exceptions prove the rule, that those destitute of such mark were symbols of ideas. Proper names of individuals are discriminated from those of places, by a line drawn on *one* side of the characters, as 若 *Jo* 翰 *han* stands for John, with the Chinese, who, it will be remembered, always write in columns from the top of the page to the bottom, beginning on the right hand. This coincidence between Egypt and China in designating a proper name, seems to have been suggested by the unique peculiarities of a symbolical tongue. Two or three examples may further elucidate this point. It is a rule with the Chinese, in choosing names, to select characters of a felicitous meaning, whether they are for private individuals or for persons in public stations about to assume some new political or literary character. When an emperor ascends the throne, he selects an imperial title, declaratory of the leading sentiments of his mind, and the characteristic of his future reign; as 道光 *Reason's Glory*, the designation of the present sovereign of China, intimates that during his government the principles of reason and rectitude should be pre-eminently illustrious. Successful warriors are honoured with titles descriptive of their exploits, and not as among Europeans, to constitute mere local reminiscences; hence a celebrated military leader was styled by Kang-he 平西王 "King subjugator of the west;" and a naval commander who captured a noted pirate in the same reign, "Pacificator of the seas." Disrespect to persons and nations is shown by opprobrious epithets, expressive of some supposed moral or physical defect. The Emperor Yung-ching of the last century,


Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

having committed one of his brothers to solitary confinement for alleged offences, deprived him of his own name, and substituted for it the ludicrous appellation 塞思黑 "shut up to study darkness." The Cochin Chinese were anciently designated 交趾 "folded toes," implying that their toes were wrapped over each other in a singular manner. The Dutch being remarkable amongst the Chinese chiefly for their "red hair,"—although "sunken eyes," and "long noses" were also imputed as national characteristics—were called 紅毛國 "the red-haired nation." This contemptuous epithet was afterwards applied to England, but is now through British efforts at Canton, yielding to the term 英吉利國 "English nation;" whence we learn that in titles, whether of honour or contempt, the communication of *sentiment* is the great point on which they turn, and that the system of spelling foreign names by monosyllabic sounds of the symbols, though less convenient than the alphabetic, answers every useful purpose. Now if the Egyptians, as is most probable, spelled their proper names in the same way as the Chinese, it would be easy to account both for the inclosure of certain symbols on the Rosetta stone, and the total oblivion of all names once attached to Egyptian hieroglyphics; while insuperable difficulties, as experience has proved, oppose their solution on the alphabetic system. If it unquestionably proved that these symbols represent the name of Ptolemy, I should still demur to the conclusion, that each symbol is, therefore, equivalent to the single Greek letters, of which πτολεμαιος is composed; because the same mode of reasoning, which facts demonstrate to be fallacious, might with equal plausibility be applied to the Chinese. For transferring the name of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Ptolemy to that tongue, *Pe-to-le-mae-sze*, are the sounds which would be required, but they might be represented by a variety of symbols; take the following as a specimen: 比多禮邁士

Now suppose the Chinese language were unknown like the Egyptian, and that these characters were a monumental inscription of the name of the Grecian King, from which it appeared probable their sounds might be obtained by comparing them with the Grecian letters, would not a process take place similar to that of Dr. Young or M. Champollion, adopting for a moment their principles of interpretation? It might be said the first sign 比 represents the letter P (口), the next 多 T (⌓), the third 禮 L (according to Dr. Young, *ole*), the fourth 邁 M, and the fifth 士 S, understanding that the requisite vowels should be supplied, on the principle adopted by many learned men in reading Hebrew and other oriental languages. No objection *a priori* could be alleged against this method of spelling that is not equally applicable to the Egyptian signs: and yet the theory involved in it is in direct opposition to fact; because each symbol denotes an *idea* to which a monosyllabic *name* is attached, common indeed to characters of other forms and signification, but not the representative of an elementary sound; and therefore has no more claim to an alphabetic property than any other character in the language.

Now this is precisely what I apprehend to have been the case with the Egyptian hieroglyphics; but whether their names were monosyllabic, like the Chinese symbols in their present state, or polysyllabic, as those would have been to a great extent if each composite form had retained the sound of its single component parts, remains to be

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

proved. If a case might be formed from a few instances of isolated Egyptian words, I should plead, that simple graphic representations of material objects were monosyllabic like the Chinese; but that when two or more of them became one hieroglyph, the sound of each in its original state was preserved in the composite character, the name of which would consequently, in contradistinction from the Chinese practice in such cases, be polysyllabic. An elucidation of this matter may be drawn from each language.

First, with regard to the usage of the Chinese; the accompanying character 糸 is a symbol of silk, named *sze*, and is one of the radicals of the language; it is therefore in its simplest form. The next I adduce is more complex, as the reader will perceive, 緦; having in addition to 糸 *sze*, two other symbols: these are in their isolated state *teen* 田 a field, and 心 *sin*, the heart; but instead of this compound symbol taking the name of each part for its own—*sze-teen-sin*—it is called simply *sze*, after its radical, and denotes a species of cloth used in mourning. Another example is supplied by the union of two of the same characters (*teen* and *sin*), in a distinct form, thus 思 ("to think, to meditate and reflect"), whose name is *sze*, though destitute of this sound in either of its components, but still monosyllabic. These instances, as the principle is of universal application, will suffice to recall the fact we have more fully illustrated elsewhere, that however complicated a Chinese symbol may be, its name is purely monosyllabic.

The practice of the Egyptians would seem to have been of the opposite character, according to Horapollo's composition of the word *baieth*, "a hawk," compounded of *bai*, "life," and *eth*, "heart," the sense of which is "life

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and heart," perhaps "life in the heart;" because the Egyptians considered the heart as the "*inclosure of life*," of which the *hawk* was the consecrated emblem on account of its drinking blood instead of water, and thereby showing its sympathy with the essence or aliment of life. It would, therefore, seem, that as the names of the two ideas which this hieroglyph represented were both preserved in its complex form, so in proportion to the number of simple ideas of which any sign was composed would be the number of syllables constituting its name; that is, there would be a monosyllable, dissyllable, trisyllable, or polysyllable, accordingly as one, two, three, or more ideas were involved in the sign. This might have been the case with the Chinese, who have a symbol composed of precisely the same elementary ideas as the Egyptian *baieth*, namely, 心 and 生 which are accurately rendered by ψῦχὴ and *καρδια*, the two Greek words used by Horapollo's translator for *bai* and *eth*; but, then, the name of this complex symbol 性 meaning *nature*, *innate properties*, *natural constitution*, *ability*, *temper*, *disposition*, is not *sinsăng*, which it would be if formed according to the Egyptian method, but *sing*.

If the principle of combining sounds with ideas were as common in the Egyptian as the contrary one is in Chinese, it would afford matter for conjecture, how far the simplest hieroglyphical forms only were used to represent foreign names. That there are many monosyllables is undeniable; but whether they are sufficiently numerous to justify the conclusion that each of the original forms of the written language is represented by a sound of but one syllable may be difficult to prove. Another question might be raised on the point, whether these phonetic signs *bai*

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

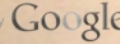
and *eth*, had each a graphic figure to correspond to it, similar to 心 and 生 of the Chinese; since life in man is also represented by a star, and the hawk is symbolical of a variety of abstract ideas, according to the postures it assumes: thus, being elevated in the air towards the east, and expanding its wings, signifies *the winds*, as though the winds had wings; rising perpendicularly towards heaven, denotes *sublimity;* descending downwards in a straight line, *humiliation*, no other bird being able to ascend or descend, except in an oblique direction; turned on its back in the air with its claws upwards, in the attitude of fighting, denotes *victory* and *pre-eminence* which it obtains over all other creatures. It is the symbol of *blood*, because it feeds on blood; of the sun, because it is long-lived, and because it alone can look with intensity on his rays; whence the sun, as the lord of vision, was sometimes painted in the form of a hawk. The herb used by physicians for healing the eyes, was named from the hawk, which was held in so much honour by the Egyptians, that he who killed it, whether by accident or design, was capitally punished. Moreover, according to Herodotus, hawks were at death interred with honours in a city* which he calls Βουτος. Some of the properties here mentioned seem applicable to the eagle, as that of looking intensely at the sun. The Chinese word 鷹 for hawk, is also applied to the eagle, sometimes with the word "divine" prefixed 神鷹; but different names are assigned to different species; one is called 角鷹 the "tufted hawk," in allusion to the feathers on its neck; another, the fierce pigeon; and a third, the imperial hawk, or falcon; and though the

* Book II. ch. lxvii.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Chinese do not carry their prejudices so far as the Egyptians, they also have a superstitious impression that medical benefit is to be derived from the feathers of its tail, with which they rub children in the small-pox, as a curative charm.

The Chinese, like the Egyptians, believe that the heart is the seat of existence — a sentiment which they express by 心者生之本也 "the heart is the fountain of life." In all probability, the moral axiom of Solomon has arisen from the prevalence of a similar physical theory among the Hebrews,—" Out of the heart are the issues of life;" who, in another place, with the same allusion, and describing the heart during the process of death, speaks of it as the "pitcher broken at the fountain." Remembering, then, that the definition of the Egyptian word for hawk is "heart and life," and that there is a symbol formed of two elements of just the same meaning in Chinese, whose sentiments coincide with theirs on the functions of this organ, moreover that many meanings are attached to one Egyptian hieroglyphic, which is also the case with one Chinese symbol, we cannot but regard the similitude between Chinese and Egyptian signs as more than ordinarily remarkable, and alike tending to establish the ideographic nature of these forms; especially as the sounds *bai* and *eth* have no relation to *sin* and *săng*, while the ideas are the same. But the comparison of these two symbols has carried us no further than to the conclusion, that two ideas are united together signifying precisely the same thing in Egyptian and in Chinese, without knowing whether the graphic signs of these ideas are the same or not. If, therefore, other hieroglyphics shall be found corresponding to the Chinese



Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

in *form*, as well as signification, we shall approach still nearer to our avowed object of identifying and harmonizing the general principles of the two languages. To attempt this identification may appear unwarranted assumption to those who object that the evidence already submitted in proof of the ideographic nature of the Chinese is insufficient. This, however, must be left to the sagacity of the intelligent reader, who, I think, can entertain no rational doubt on the subject.

If two nations, widely separated from each other in locality and intercourse during a series of ages, extending from remote antiquity to the present era, should embody in their *written* medium descriptions of certain natural objects so far coalescing in external figure as undoubtedly to represent the same thing, and conveying some thought to the mind congruous with the general impression produced by the prototype, then it becomes important to inquire how nearly these two figures are assimilated in their origin, and identical in their objects. But to state the case in a still plainer light. Should symbols of the sun and moon, drawn exactly alike in China and in Egypt, be found to represent not only these heavenly bodies themselves, but the same figurative properties in the language of both countries, would there not be reason to infer that they had one origin? As pertinent to this subject, I quote a paragraph from some remarks of Dr. Young.* "The common astronomical diagram for the sun ⊙ seems to have been adopted by the Latin astrologers, from their masters in Egypt, since it is not very probable both should have employed a point in the centre of the circle, without some communication with each other; the circle

* In the Encyclopædia, Supplement, p. 55.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

alone having been mentioned by some of the Greek authors, who say that it was the symbol of the sun. The enchorial name of the sun is extremely like that which corresponds in the manuscripts to this hieroglyphic, and a similar circle, with rays diverging from it, though seldom exactly in straight lines, is used in the sense of enlightening, or rendering illustrious."

Now if it were improbable that the Latins should use the same astronomical sign as the Egyptians without having derived it from them, is it not still more improbable that the Chinese should not only have exactly the same sign standing in their original forms of writing, but employ it in a variety of ways similar to its uses among the Egyptians, and yet, after all, not have borrowed it from the same source? The ancient Chinese form to which we allude, is this ⊙. There is also one with lines diverging from the circle, corresponding to the Egyptian form described above; and although Dr. Young does not say whether these lines proceed from the circumference or the centre, I should apprehend the former, from his using the word *circle*, like the Chinese figure [figure], whose lines, were they continued, would meet in the centre.

These figures [figures] are also different modes of describing the same object with the Chinese, all which are now superseded by the modern form 日. This symbol of the *sun* and *day*, according to native philologists, is one of the class denominated pictorial; that is, to represent objects. The moon also belongs to the same class, whose name in Chinese is *yue*, and in Egyptian *ioh*, which latter sound, according to the power of the French alphabet, is very similar to the Chinese name pronounced, as though written in English, Yoh. It is curious, too,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

that these two symbols ⊙☽ should be united by the Egyptians to form one hieroglyph — which may be seen on the Rosetta stone in the British Museum — just the same as ⊙☽ *ming*, in Chinese, which means "clearness, splendour, intelligence, to shed light upon, bright, perspicuous;" while, according to Horapollo, the combination in Egyptian symbolizes *eternity*, because these heavenly objects are eternal elements, derived from the idea of perpetual light, unceasing splendour, indicated by the unbroken succession of light in the rising of one of these bodies immediately on the setting of the other: and who does not perceive that this idea is infinitely more worthy the dignity of a complicated and refined system of hieroglyphics, by which minds are brought into intelligent contact through the medium of the eye, than Champollion's, which makes the combined symbols of two of the mightiest powers in the visible universe subservient only to an elementary sound?

"Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus."

Light, being an essential element of utility and beauty in our world, is everywhere employed to prefigure moral excellence and true dignity; but especially in the East, where all its depositaries and instruments of action are of surpassing splendour; hence the Chinese not only ascribe to it perpetual existence, but seem to invest the element of light with a sort of omnipresence, created by the successive agency of those two heavenly bodies which they identify with its diffusion, as in the well-known beautiful phrase 日 月 所 照 "wherever the sun and moon give light;" by which they designate every conceivable spot in the universe. Another application of these two symbols by the Chinese, is derived merely from

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the different relative positions which they sustain to each other; so that instead of standing side by side, they are placed vertically, 易 the sun above the moon, to indicate change, alteration; which is a natural suggestion, from the one power ruling the day, and the other the night; whence the symbol so placed is named *yih*, and becomes the index of one of the most important of their metaphysical systems, designated the "science of changes;" which, it is assumed, took place at the origin of the universe, by the alternation of light, symbolized by the sun, and of darkness, depicted by the moon placed under him. But this theory will be explained in its proper place.

Another illustration is afforded by the addition of 皿 *ming*, a vessel, placed under the sun and moon, but made thus 盟 in the ancient pictorial style of writing; which means to take oath, or bind one's self by an open and explicit declaration before the gods, sipping the blood of the victim poured out in sacrifice, under the implied wish that, if the covenant were broken, the violator imprecated on himself the death inflicted on the animal. Whether the composition of this symbol included any reference to the worship of the *sun* and *moon*, or the presence of 明 *ming*, merely indicated the open public manner of the transaction, does not appear. I am inclined, however, to the opinion, that the Chinese have a very superstitious veneration for the mere element of light, which, with their love of abstractions, might readily be converted into a divinity, whose appropriate visible representative would be the sun, which is called the sovereign of lights; and to which probably the sentence, "the light of Deity illumines every place," was originally applied. Chinese are taught to rise in token of reverence, even when a lighted candle is

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

brought. The word 亡 "lost," placed above 明 *ming*, means "blindness;" that is, extinguished light. From these combinations it will plainly appear, how the essential idea of the symbol can be modified, either by transposing its parts, or adding a new character; proving that what is effected in alphabetical languages by the disposition of letters, must be produced in Chinese by combinations of thought; and developing, as I think, the only correct principles, on which to analyze Egyptian hieroglyphics, which, like the Chinese, were originally pictorial, if we may judge from the prevalence of rude forms of animals and material objects in the surviving inscriptions on ancient monuments.

Closely related to the sun and moon are the two principal deities of Egypt—Isis and Osiris—a female and male principle personified, or an imaginary power, to which, though the comparison may not be complete, I cannot but think the *yin* and *yang* of the Chinese bear a very strong resemblance. Their names are totally different, but the order of arrangement, consisting of the female taking precedence of the male, is precisely the same — Isis corresponding to Yin, and Osiris to Yang. 陰 *Yin*, in Chinese, is the female energy in nature which represents darkness, the inferior part of creation, and one of the supposed forms into which chaos was divided, from which organized matter was eventually educed. It is, also, a designation of the moon, though not the ordinary word for that object.

Isis is supposed by some writers on Egyptian literature to be the moon, which was universally worshipped in Egypt as a goddess, and, as a creative power presiding over the earth, seemed in conjunction with Osiris to com-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

prehend all nature. Horapollo says, Isis was a woman, and a divinity; also an emblem of the year, and of a star; supposed to be the offspring of Thoth and Rhea; compared to Ceres, or the earth, the goddess of fertility and of maternal love, and analogous to Proserpine, the queen of the lower regions in Hades, and the wife of Pluto. Yin is not worshipped by the Chinese, but, as one of the two principles in nature which originated all things, it possesses several properties in common with the earth, as the second power in the universe, of which heaven has the precedence; so Isis, as the goddess of agriculture and general cultivation, seems to bear affinity to the notion of earth among the Chinese, who regard it as the mother of all things. Moreover, Yang is the male energy of the Chinese; first in importance, because the superior in nature, although, like the Egyptian Osiris, second in order. It denotes splendour, light, and energy; and is also an epithet of the sun. In the Chinese system it may be considered as coinciding with heaven, much in the same way as Yin coincides with earth; hence in different aspects and relations these two powers may be represented sometimes by heaven and earth, and sometimes by the sun and moon; or rather by all these powers united, notwithstanding the Chinese mundane theory, which designates Yin and Yang as a male and female creator. So in the Coptic, Osiris, who is denoted hieroglyphically by an eye and a sceptre, includes the idea of male energy and activity ; and is sometimes compared to the Nile, sometimes to the sun; wherefore, whatever may be its external form, it would seem to intimate the all-important power in nature.

The Chinese and the Egyptians so far agree in senti-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ment on the First Cause, that both acknowledge two supreme powers, of different sexes, emblems respectively of light and darkness, energy and fertility, perfection and imperfection, order and confusion; but while the Egyptians personify these powers, and worship them as gods, the Chinese regard them as impersonal existences, the offspring of unity or a monad, but still entitled to the venerable distinction of co-creating principles, from which the three supreme agencies in nature—heaven, earth, and man—have derived their origin. It is a characteristic in Chinese philosophy to mystify familiar objects in nature, which they then reduce to first principles, from which they form a system of consecutive reasoning, applicable to every part of creation, and based on an assumed first cause—an indivisible, indestructible essence, without figure, form, mode, or personality—exhibiting, in all their speculations, a love of the process of abstraction, by which they immaterialize the grossest substances.

It is difficult to ascertain the sentiments of the ancient Egyptians on the supreme powers in the universe, since much confusion has, no doubt, been created by their nomenclature being intermingled with the Grecian mythology and pantheology. It is probable that while they had not proceeded so far in analytical philosophy, as to recognize with the Chinese one infinite essence, their gods having been introduced into Greece, were there remodelled and designated anew, prior to their restoration again to Egypt, under other names and titles. An instance occurs in a deity who inhabited the constellation of the Great Bear, whose Grecian appellation was Typhon, but his Egyptian name, according to Plutarch, was Seth, Bebon or Babyn, and Smy.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

In pursuing comparisons, however, we must not be guided by particular coincidences, striking as they may appear: such, for example, as the constellation of the Bear, worshipped alike by Chinese and Egyptians, because all nations, from the earliest period of their existence, have paid especial attention to it; but if celestial and natural phenomena are set apart for some purpose, common only to the two nations, there is, then, reason to infer a more than ordinary relation between them, based on some great and peculiar principles. The Egyptians had what has been termed a genius of the whole world, symbolized by *i, h, h, t, h, o*,* which seems to have been a sort of chaos, whose personification was not generally admitted. I am not aware that the Chinese have any conventional symbol of a similar nature to this, which I apprehend indicated the paramount importance of Egyptian influence over the destinies of the world, if not to assert its absolute control over every other portion of the globe; but it is a singular fact, that the Chinese use expressions, which attribute the dominion of the world, if not its entire possession, to themselves; whilst by designating themselves the middle country, they assume the same position on the earth with the ancient Egyptians, who also described Egypt as occupying the central domain of the world, and designated it by an appellation to that effect.

Plutarch says, the sun, called On, otherwise Re, or Phre, was represented by a young child rising out of the lotus, which was also emblematical of the rising of the Nile, and the return of the sun; and that this flower had a sacred character may be confidently assumed, from the "frequency of its occurrence in the bas-reliefs and paint-

* Encyclopædia Britt. Sup. p. 44.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ings in the Egyptian temples, in all representations of sacrifices, religious ceremonies, and in tombs, and whatever is connected with death and another life." Now the Chinese have a term common to the lotus, and the water-lily, of which there are two varieties, white and red; it is 蓮花 or 蓮藕荷: the former character, which is the principal one, is formed of "plant," "wheel," and "to go swiftly." This flower is represented in the descriptions of the metempsychosis by the sect of Fŭh, as effectually averting punishment from criminals doomed to suffer in Hades, when interposed by the goddess of mercy between the criminal and the instrument of punishment, just at the moment of his apprehended destruction. This illustration occurs only with the sect of Fŭh, which is of Indian origin, and was established in China during the first century of the Christian æra; still it affords another instance of the similarity of sentiment between Egypt and China; but whether India was the common source to both nations of the superstitious tenet, or Egypt was the original parent, is doubtful. There can be little room for doubt, however, that the flower to which the Chinese ascribed the virtue of saving offenders in another state, is of the same species as the Egyptian lotus, which, according to Herodotus, is a kind of lily, famed for its sacred character; and that the natural description of the lotus by Herodotus, and the account of the Chinese lily by natives, agree in this, as well as other particulars, that both have seeds.

In the classification of characters according to their final sound in a Chinese dictionary, entitled, "The Source of Characters engraven on Bells and Tripods," there are two ancient forms of 田 *teen*, "a field," the one consisting of a cross, formed of straight lines within a circle and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

through its centre, thus ⊕; the other of waving lines crossing each other, thus ⊛; the definitions of which, under the modern form, are, to plant grain in rows, arranged in order, a field laid out in plots, a cultivated field, to plough, to hunt; to the former of these figures the following sentence, from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, applies: "It is remarkable, that the wheel signifying land had been noticed by the Jesuits as resembling the old Chinese character for the word field." The Chinese term for the husbandman's water-wheel, is 田家水車 "field-person's water-wheel;" the Egyptian wheel for raising water is designated *tung-chay*, 筒車 "a wheel with a tube." As the government of China have, from remote antiquity, encouraged agriculture, and provided for the irrigation of the soil by diverting rivulets and streams through means of suitable machinery into artificial channels prepared for them, it is probable the original word may have been derived from some rude instrument in early times used to irrigate rice-fields, which require extraordinary supplies of water to insure their successful culture. Indeed, proceeding on what we venture to consider an established position — that ideas in Chinese were, in the first instance, represented by figures — the original form of the character for field, must have been so far graphically descriptive, as either to have represented the object itself, or some well-known feature of it; while the Egyptian form of the wheel, we are taught by Dr. Young, signifies land, and in connection with the square, "splendid land — characters which seem to be essential parts of the name of Egypt."

The circumstance of similar numerals in the languages of different countries, is usually considered presumptive

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

evidence, if not of one common origin, at least of close affinity. *Form* and *power* are the chief points of comparison between the Chinese and Egyptian numerals; and if there be no mutual relation, the coincidence is certainly very striking; for the *principle* involved in the modern forms of the Chinese numerals, is essentially the same as that on which the Egyptian mode of enumeration proceeds, while the original *forms* of the characters are in many respects the same as the hieroglyphs. The Chinese numerals are: 一 *one;* 二 *two;* 三 *three;* 四 *four;* 五 *five;* 六 *six;* 七 *seven;* 八 *eight;* 九 *nine;* 十 *ten;* and for every additional *ten,* 二十 *twice ten,* or 三十 *thrice ten,* as the case may be, up to one hundred, which is expressed by 百 *pih;* while the intermediate odd numbers above *tens* are denoted by characters added; thus, *twenty-five* in Chinese would be 二十五 *twice ten* and *five;* characters standing before 十 being *tens,* and after it *units.* The Egyptian numerals, as far as I have been able to ascertain them from records of the hieroglyphs to which I have access, are: | *one;* || *two;* ||| *three;* |||| *four;* ||||| *five;* |||||| *six;* ||||||| *seven;* and probably *eight* and *nine* are the same, with the addition of a stroke to each. However, this figure ∩ is the sign for *ten,* to which numerals in the above form are affixed, to denote any additional number; as ∩||||||| ten and seven (three and four) stand for seventeen. Again; *forty-two* in Egyptian is thus made, ∩∩∩∩|| namely, *four tens* and *two.* It is true, the present Chinese strokes are horizontal, and the Egyptian vertical; while some of the numerals of the former are not composed of single straight lines: the difference, however, is rather apparent than real; since on the ancient vases of the Chinese the sym-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

bol for *one* is not horizontal but vertical, that is, exactly the same as the Egyptian, thus | ; and for *ten* it is made with ⸸ a ball in the middle of the vertical stroke, omitting the horizontal; *thirty* made thus 卅 and *forty* thus 卌 are not in form greatly unlike the Egyptian mode, while the principle is the same; *four* was anciently written thus 亖 composed of twice *two*; from which I infer all the numerals of the Chinese to have been originally like those of the Egyptian, which we have traced as far as *seven*.

Ordinals seem also to be formed by the same process in both languages, which consists in placing a certain character before the numeral to change its signification, as 第 before 一 in Chinese 第一 and a hieroglyph of this form [glyph] before | in Egyptian [glyph]| both denote *the first*; and so with all the other numbers up to ten. The repetition of an act is indicated by a certain symbol placed after the number, as *thrice* would be expressed in Egyptian by [glyph] and in Chinese thus 三次, literally, *three* times. Now, while the figure of the characters is different, their order and principle are, in every instance, the same, which are important points in the comparison of languages without an alphabet; and more especially as, in this respect, they resemble no other known language of the world.

There are also numerous symbols drawn exactly alike in both tongues, specimens of which I subjoin, with the Chinese meaning attached, but without the Egyptian, which, I believe, is not yet fixed: they are ++ the composite form of *grass*; 二 *two*; 三 *three*; 口 *a mouth*; 十 *ten*; ⚍ a whole line on a divided line, like the symbols in the *Yih-king*, the combinations of which will

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

be explained afterwards; 匕 *a spoon;* 𠆢 *to cover;* 丰 *luxuriant,* a fine appearance; 大 *great,* which occurs twenty-eight times on Plate 79 of Champollion's collection of Egyptian symbols; 丯 *part of;* 拜 *to worship;* 皿 *a dish.* In Chinese these are significant representations either of external objects or abstract notions; but whether they betoken any thing correspondent in Egyptian must be determined by future researches.

It will be obvious to the intelligent reader, that to do justice to this subject would require a volume; and therefore that the brief space occupied by my remarks can only contain a few specimens of the mode of discussion and illustration, the interesting details of which, as they would constantly accumulate in prosecuting the researches to their legitimate results, must be reserved for a more formal and direct investigation of the points in question. Is it too much to hope, since the importance of such studies is at once admitted, that a portion of the learned of Great Britain, whose empire has so absorbing an interest in Oriental language and literature, will consecrate their abilities and zeal to the cultivation of philology, especially of the symbolical character, as the basis of a more extended acquaintance with the physiology of the human race?

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SECTION II.

A SKETCH OF THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF CHINA—CHARACTER OF HER FIRST SOVEREIGNS—RECORDS OF THE DELUGE—LAWS, ANTIQUITIES, AND CUSTOMS OF HER EARLIEST INHABITANTS.

THE immediate origin of nations lies concealed in remote antiquity, accessible only by fables and genealogies, which would be utterly unworthy of attention, were it not that outlines of truth are traced amidst delineations of error, and facts disclosed which incidentally corroborate the divine records. Pretensions to celestial descent, a very high antiquity, or super-human usages, so enthral the reasoning powers, and debase the understandings of civilized Pagans, that the most puerile and absurd fictions propagated by the historian, are believed by the mass of the people. Tradition—the source of information, and basis of historic records, respecting the ancient world—is most uncertain both with regard to the correctness of its communications, and the period during which even true statements remain unadulterated. When occurrences have been committed to writing early, allusions to them in future ages will coincide much more accurately with the original than in cases only supported by oral testimony; and hence, from the early cultivation of letters by the Chinese, their account of the Deluge, though intermingled with fable, may be expected to resemble the unquestion-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

able facts of the Mosaic narrative more closely than traditions of the same event among tribes unacquainted with the art of writing. The materials of thought first embodied in composition, would be derived from familiar habits of reflection, present wants and feelings, and attachment to immemorial customs. Notwithstanding the false and foolish systems, superstitious observances, historical and speculative errors, prevalent in nations remote from the first abode of man, they are founded on traditional truth, of which some fragments still remain in the partial resemblance of their parables, proverbs, and customs, to those of sacred Scripture. Evidence on this point is furnished by the Chinese, who carry their historical researches beyond the Flood, and profess to describe occurrences before that catastrophe, which could only be known through the medium of one family. According to their records, *Pwan-koo* was the first person in existence after the separation of the heavens and the earth, between which he lived, whose heights and depths, together with the principles of creation, he had ability to comprehend. He was the original ruler of the world. Some native descriptions represent him as wearing an apron of leaves, and holding the sun and moon in either hand, but say nothing of his creation. Others describe him as an extraordinary personage from the vast deserts, whose origin is unknown, who was four times taller than other human beings, had horns on his head, and teeth protruding out of his mouth. He is said to have taught navigation, made passages through the mountains, and to have reigned as the first king of the human race.

To the government of this imaginary sovereign succeeded three dynasties, denominated, *Teen-hwang-she*, *Te-*

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

hwang-she, Jin-hwang-she; that is, the imperial families of heaven, earth, and man.

The first (heaven's) dynasty embraced a period of eighteen thousand years, during which thirteen brothers reigned, who were wholly abstracted, inactive, and engaged in constant self-renovation. Certain astronomical characters, denominated "celestial stems," and now used in chronological computation, were, it is said, invented at this æra to determine the length of the year.

During the second dynasty (earth's), comprising the same term of years, eleven brothers reigned, who instituted laws relating to the heavenly bodies, by which day and night were divided, and thirty days assigned to one month.

The third dynasty (man's), extended through a space of forty-five thousand years, during which nine brothers ruled. In this period hills and rivers were separated into nine divisions. Human beings, among whom respectful manners and pure customs prevailed, occupied one territory. The kingly office was not mere pageantry; nor were the functions of state ministers empty titles. Good government was established by rulers, and correct instruction diffused among the people. Males and females originated food and drink.

The three periods into which this fabulous æra was divided, accord in arrangement with the Chinese theory* of creation, which recognizes heaven, earth, and man, as three great powers, by which all inferior things were originally produced.

A native historian,† disputing the chronological statements it involves, reasons in the following manner:—

* The principles of this theory will be explained afterwards.

† See *Kang-keen-e-che*, a native history, in 40 vols., from which the matter in the text has been derived.

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"How," he asks, "could ten thousand years and upwards elapse, after the existence of the causative principle, before the male power was begotten, and the heavens were spread abroad; and then a similar period pass away prior to the birth of its female coadjutor, and the formation of the earth, and then another of equal duration precede the union of these creative elements and the generation of all things? and, moreover, a process of operation then take place, requiring from its origin to its completion forty or fifty thousand years, before the sages were born? Is not such a theory in direct opposition to all reason? From Yaou and Shun to the present time includes about three thousand years. The three dynasties, Hea, Shang, and Chow, were not equal in duration to the reigns of Tang and Yu who preceded them; while Han, Tang, and Sung were comprised in a still shorter period. Now if, in the revolutions of time, affairs are not stable more than two or three centuries, how could forty or fifty thousand years revolve after the creation, before aerial elements began to act, human excellence was developed, the waters were separated from the earth, or the people supplied with food? Is it probable these important affairs were in *disorder until the time of the five emperors?* I am of opinion, that Pwan-koo did not long precede Fŭh-he and Shin-nung, perhaps a thousand years, certainly not ten thousand, and that they were succeeded by Yaou and Shun, probably at the distance of a century—assuredly not a thousand years. Every scholar ought minutely to investigate the subject." Choo-foo-tsze, a celebrated historian and philosopher of the twelfth century, remarks of this period, that several things ascribed to it were invented in subsequent ages, and the "stream of time rolled back; it

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

being impossible to give entire credit to the traditions of those remote ages."

Emerging from mere fable we are still left in much darkness and uncertainty. Three celebrated emperors, it is said, ruled over China in high antiquity, the first of whom commenced his reign B.C. 3369. It is from this period that Choo-tsze, already alluded to, begins his history. The name of this prince was Tae-haou—"excessive splendour," because his perfect holiness and virtue were resplendent as the luminaries of heaven; and Fŭh-he, corrupted from Paou-he, "the sacrificer," because he taught the rites of sacrifice. "In the beginning of human life," says Chinese history, "men and beasts herded together; mankind knew they had a mother, but were ignorant of their father, and followed the impulses of their passions without restraint from polite ceremonies. But Fŭh-he invented nets for fishes, and snares for wild beasts, in the use of which he instructed the people, for the two-fold purpose of supplying their wants and procuring victims to offer in sacrifice. He recommended pastoral employments, taught music, and enforced the duty of marriage. He drew eight diagrams, to represent the manner in which the world originated, and to illustrate the changes and combinations in nature during the process of creation. His virtue united supreme intelligence above and subordinate powers beneath. In the heavens were seen celestial resemblances, with splendid figures of birds and other creatures; on the earth, descriptions from dragons and horses, which served as models for his imitation; while midway between heaven and earth was the golden medium or true principle of all things." "Some European writers," remarks Dr. Morrison, "have ventured to call

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Fŭh-he the same person as Noah of the west; but as the tradition is that he had no father, was the first to whom mortal reign was given, that his name was *Fung* רוח *ruach*, *wind*, *spirit*, *breath*, perhaps implying that he derived his name from the breath of the Almighty; that he possessed perfect holiness and virtue, resplendent as the glorious lights of the sun and moon, from which his name Tae-paou is taken; that he taught the various useful arts and rites of sacrifice, from which circumstance is derived his name Paou-he, the sacrificer, afterwards corrupted to Fŭh-he; and that his posterity reigned fifteen generations during a period of 17,787 years; according to this tradition he may probably be considered the first of human kind—the Adam of the west, rather than Noah."* Several epithets are given to this sovereign, expressive of the arts and practices which he originated, according to Chinese custom, with regard to inventors of civil or sacred employments: the most interesting, however, is the offerer of sacrifice, since it not only indicates the high antiquity of this species of worship, but confirms the opinion, that sacred usages were diffused by tradition among the ancient nations, of which one of the most important was that of victims offered by the head of the family in his sacerdotal character.

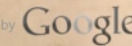
Another personage named Neu-wo-she is supposed to have lived in an early age of the world, whom some affirm to be a divinity, others a sacred female whose power was conspicuous in creation, and others, one whose sex is undetermined, but of the same maternal descent as Fŭh-he. She was born with divine intelligence, and became a conductor of ceremonies preliminary to marriage. She is

* See Morrison's Dictionary, Vol. I. p. 669.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

said to have melted stones to repair the heavens, and to have destroyed the successor of Fŭh-he, because he raised a flood of water and spread misery and desolation on the earth. She made wind and stringed instruments, to harmonize aerial elements, assist the gods at solemn rites, and tranquillize the dispositions of men. Since this personage is described as repairing the wastes occasioned by a deluge, her story slightly resembles that of Ovid's Pyrrha, who with Deucalion, the survivors of the poet's flood, restored the human race by casting stones behind them.

Suy-jin-she, sometimes confounded with Neu-wo-she, was the first person, according to tradition, who obtained fire by friction in boring wood, whence he acquired the title "fire producer." The people, who had made some progress in civilization, were still ignorant of cooking, until this individual, by observing the heavenly bodies and investigating the five elements, perceived that the firmament contained fire, and a beautiful wood the property of light. He set apart ten different trees, from which, according to their season, he obtained the element of fire, and taught the people its application to domestic and other purposes; these were—in spring, the elm and the weeping willow; in summer, the date and the almond, for which, in the last month of that quarter, two kinds of mulberry were substituted; in autumn, two species not seasoned, one of a firm, the other of a flexible texture, the latter of which was used also in sacrifices; and in winter, the ash-tree and the sandal-wood. During this period, and by the same person, knotted cords were invented, preliminary to the art of writing, for which it was a substitute; and as a means of government, there were larger or smaller


Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

knots made as the affairs to be remembered were of greater or less moment. Schools of instruction, or rather elevated terraces, open on every side, probably such as were anciently raised at the gates of cities, were now first established, together with the usages of commercial intercourse and traffic by barter.

These records, translated from native history, when compared with their ancient classical literature, supply the opinions of the Chinese on the origin of the universe, its affairs, circumstances, and inhabitants; for which they endeavour to account, by the exercise of their own ingenuity, independently of the statements and reasonings of other nations, as though they were the entire world, in which no human beings but their own ancestors ever possessed an ancient location.

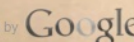
Next on record is Shin-nung, "the divine husbandman," who is considered as the father of agricultural pursuits. He discovered different species of grain, herbs, and medicinal plants; prepared implements of husbandry; taught his subjects to till the soil, and plant it conformably with the seasons. When sickness prevailed he tasted the juices of herbs and trees, and examined the principles of cold and heat. In one day seventy herbs were, by his divine renovation, made into prescriptions to cure all kinds of maladies; hence the healing art is dated from this period. He, moreover, examined fountains, and discriminated sweet waters from those which were bitter. He diffused knowledge among the people, gave them rest from their sorrows, caused their food to strengthen them, and saved them from premature death. The customs of this age were simple, grave, upright, and virtuous. Resentment and strife were unknown. The people brought their mer-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

chandize to the markets and shops now first established for barter, and having exchanged it retired to their habitations in peace. This personage, "the divine husbandman," is now worshipped as the patron of those who till the land; and his conduct is imitated by the emperor, who every year sets his hand to the plough, to indicate his desire for agricultural prosperity.

Hwang-te, the next sovereign, was born with divine intelligence, able to speak while an infant, obedient and respectful in youth, grave and sincere in manhood, discerning and sagacious in maturer years. The son of his predecessor was opposed by the nobles of the kingdom, whose rebellion he himself sought to suppress, without intending to usurp the government. But when they offered submission to his authority he accepted it; and then, by cultivating virtue, preparing weapons, promoting discipline, and training wild beasts for war, he quickly subdued all enemies. A partisan of the discarded family opposed him, and sought to bewilder his army in a mist, from which, however, he extricated himself by *a magnetic pole attached to his chariot, which always pointed south;* and, having slain his adversary, received from the congregated nobility public homage as the son of heaven. In this reign *Ta-yaou* invented a system of chronological computation by a cycle of sixty years. It is denominated *hwa-kea-tsze*, the first year of which is computed from the sixty-first of this reign.* It is composed of certain astronomical or horary characters, denominated the ten celestial stems, and the twelve terrestrial branches—the former are keă, yih, ping, ting, woo, ke, kang, sin, jin, kwei; the latter, tsze, chow, yin, maou, shin, sze, woo, we, shin, yew,

* B.C. 2596.



Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

seuh, hae. The terms are applied to years, months, days, and hours; thus kea-tsze denotes the first year of the cycle, and the beginning of the month, or day, because these two are the first characters of the series; that is, keă is the first of the celestial stems, and tsze the first of the terrestrial branches; and thus they proceed regularly to ten, when the celestial numbers being exhausted, the first of them is then united with the eleventh terrestrial, thus *keă-seuh* stand for eleven. The numerical value of the characters depends entirely on their relative position, and may be further illustrated by the characters *woo-seuh*, which denote the thirty-fifth year of the cycle, where *seuh*, that represented *one* in *eleven*, occupies the place of *five*. Were it not that two signs represent single figures under ten, the celestial stems would stand for tens, and the terrestrial for units, changing, however, their value according to their relative position. The number to which the cycle is limited containing just six times the number of celestial signs, and five times the number of the terrestrial, the two last characters in each stand for sixty. The terms of the cycle, which are not used in ordinary enumeration, are applied to the points of the compass, the needle of which is said to point to the south: this instrument appears to have been derived from the magnetic pole anciently attached to chariots, alluded to above, and was probably invented in China at a very early period. The terrestrial branches are also applied to the day, which is divided into twelve periods of two hours each. The first sign, *tsze*, denotes midnight, which embraces the preceding and the subsequent hour, each character being prefixed by *keaou* or *ching;* as *keaou-tsze* denotes from eleven till twelve, and *ching-tsze* from twelve to one—the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

first watch of the night; these two characters are placed before the other signs in the same way as *woo*, "the point of noon," preceded by *keaou*; *keaou-woo* would point out the hour from eleven to twelve at noon, and by *ching*, *ching-woo*, from twelve to one o'clock.

Whenever this system was invented it has certainly prevailed throughout many centuries, and deserves attention from every Chinese scholar who would ascertain the chronological matters of the Chinese according to their own arrangement. It was during this reign that *Tsang-hëë-tsee*, minister of state of Hwang-te, invented the symbols of the language, which we have already explained. Persons were appointed to make astronomical observations on the different heavenly bodies, particularly the Great Bear, and to investigate the nature of the five elements—water, fire, metal, wood, and earth. Almanacs were first made, and a sort of armillary sphere prepared to represent the laws and revolutions of the heavenly bodies. Caps were now brought into use, high behind and low in front, whose pendent ornaments prevented the eye from seeing depraved objects, with a provision on each side to guard the ear against slanderous insinuations; diamonds collected on a string of silk, constituted these moral safeguards. Colours employed were black and yellow, in imitation of heaven and earth; flowers of plants and trees were used for dyeing, to distinguish between nobles and plebeians. Chariots, horses, and bullocks began to be used. A temple was erected, in which sacrifices were offered to *Shang-te*, the supreme ruler. Persons were instructed by the queen, *Yuen-fei*, to rear the silk-worm, who arranged the silk it produced for weaving, and supplied garments throughout the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

empire; whence after-ages sacrificed to her as originating the nurture of the silk-worm. Chĕ-keang is now the principal province for the cultivation of the mulberry-tree, on which the silk-worm is reared, with which *Keang-nan*, *Hoo-peih*, and *Sze-chuen* are the only provinces that produce fine silk. Further particulars on the care bestowed by the Chinese in nourishing the silk-worm, derived from native authorities, will be introduced in the chapter on natural history.

In this reign cities and towns were built, and governors appointed over them to unite all in harmony. Measures for land were adopted, to sooth irritation and allay discontents among the people. When the emperor died, one of his ministers took his garments, cap, table, and staff into the temple of ancestors, and there sacrificed to his *manes*.

With regard to the next sovereign, nothing worth translating is recorded; we shall therefore pass on to his successor, *Chuen-heun*, a title expressive of his eminent and correct conduct. When fifteen years old he became the minister of his predecessor, and at the age of thirty succeeded him as emperor. He was free from selfish partialities, and diffused substantial benefits throughout his kingdom. His mind was comprehensive enough to embrace distant objects, and sufficiently clear to investigate minute affairs. He obeyed the will of Heaven, and acquainted himself with the necessities of the people. He blended benevolence with dignity, kindness with faithfulness, and cultivated personal virtues, by which he obtained universal homage. His countenance was pleasing, his virtue lofty, and his deportment resembled the motion of the heavenly bodies. Having chosen the golden

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

medium, he filled his earthly domain with benign influences; so that wherever the sun and moon shone, or wind and rain penetrated, there he received unfeigned submission. He and his queen offered sacrifice to the supreme ruler; after which she bore him a son, from whom the Chow dynasty descended. He prayed again, when he was encouraged by the felicitous omen of a flying swallow, and another son was born to him, who became the source of the Shang dynasty. A red dragon was the omen which appeared when Yaou was born. A fourth son became heir to the throne. He, however, proceeded to unlimited dissipation, and on account of bad government the nobles deposed him, and established Yaou in his stead. This is the ancient chieftain so renowned for his personal excellence and virtuous government. He was a descendant of Hwang-te. Heaven and men having sternly rejected his wicked predecessor, inferior princes acknowledged his sovereignty. He ascended the throne at the age of sixteen; fire was the element chosen to illustrate the virtues by which he reigned, in allusion to the five elements of which the earth is composed. He commanded two astronomers to make almanacs, and celestial instruments for dividing time; to determine the means of supplying an intercalary month, to regulate the four seasons, and to complete the year. Southern barbarians came to court, and presented the emperor with a divine tortoise, occupying a space of more than three cubits, marked on the back like a frog; and bearing historical records from the creation to the present time. Yaou commanded it to be enrolled and designated the astronomical tortoise. In the palace grew a felicitous plant, which put forth a leaf every day, from the first of the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

month till the fifteenth; after which it daily shed a leaf until there were but few left, when one leaf was so obstinate as to remain; from which circumstance the decades of every month were ascertained, and the plant denominated "the astronomical plant." The felicitous omens, *Ke-lin*, a male and female fabulous animal, and *fung-hwang*, a male and female bird of the imagination—the phœnix of the Chinese, which always appear in seasons of prevailing virtue, now by their presence bore testimony to Heaven's approbation of the reigning sovereign. When he made a tour through his dominions, the boys sung in the streets, "To support us your multitudinous subjects is your majesty's highest delight; who, without understanding, and in a manner unconscious, obey your majesty's laws." The old men played at the jang,* and sung upon the road, "The sun rises, and we go forth to labour; the sun sets, and we retire to rest: we dig wells and drink; we plough our fields and eat; what is the influence your majesty exerts over us?"† Officers of bordering territories blessed him, and said, "May riches, long life, and many sons, crown your majesty's sacred person." The emperor replied, "Numerous sons cause painful apprehensions; riches involve many cares; and

* The jang was a piece of wood like a shoe, a cubit and four-tenths long, and three-tenths wide. One end was wide, and the other pointed. The boys who played at it in the close of the year, divided themselves into two parties, and laying one jang on the ground, walked with another in the hand to the distance of thirty or forty paces, from whence they threw it at that lying on the ground, and he who inserted the one within the other, won the game.—See Morrison's Dictionary, Vol. I. Part I. p. 558, word *Jang*.

† The songs of the boys and old men indicate the blessings of good government, which was so benign in its aspect that its subjects were almost unconscious of being under any authority. "To play at the jang, and sing, denotes a period of general national prosperity: this custom cannot be adopted on any family or individual occasion of joy."—See Morrison, as above, page 560.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

long life meets with much disgrace." His congratulators rejoined, "Heaven having created all people, gives suitable occupations. Where there are many sons, situations will be provided; what need is there of fear? If riches abound, persons can be employed to distribute them; why should trouble be anticipated? The principles, as well as the material objects of the universe, are splendid and glorious. When good doctrines cease to exist, the cultivation of virtue must fail; then your majesty can leave the world to join the immortal genii; and where is the disgrace of ascending a white cloud to associate with the imperial clan?" The Shoo-king speaks of Yaou as acquiring the title "extensive merit," by his devotion to good government. He was reverential, intelligent, cultivated, thoughtful, and withal easy and graceful in his deportment. These virtues were rendered illustrious by his external acts; he scrutinized heaven above, and earth beneath. His exalted virtue was displayed in love for his kindred, to the union of whom in affection an equitable adjustment of national affairs succeeded; and when his own people were enlightened, he then united all provinces in harmony corresponding to the regularity and order of the seasons. In his benevolence he resembled Heaven, in his wisdom a divinity. His presence displayed the splendour of the sun; his deportment the majesty of the clouds. His vast resources were unaccompanied with pride; and his distinguished rank sustained without extravagance. He wore a yellow cap and silken garments; rode in a crimson chariot drawn by white horses. Rushes covered his pavilion, which had not been prepared by art; its beams were destitute of ornament, and the whole structure plain and substantial without pillars. There was no

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

outward adorning to the carriage in which he went to sacrifice to Heaven. Mats were woven of grass. Soups were not enriched with condiments. Rice and vegetables were served up in earthenware dishes, liquids in earthen vessels. There was no display of gold and silver, pearls and diamonds, embroidered and ornamented silks, or rare and costly articles of any description. Instruments of amusement were disesteemed. Lascivious sounds of music were never heard. The walls of the palace and other apartments had no expensive colouring. Cloth formed the upper, and skins the lower clothing of the body, which, as well as shoes, were not renewed until quite old.

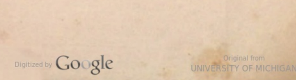
The following account of the Chinese deluge, which occurred in this reign, is translated from the Shoo-king. According to the Chinese system of chronology it happened in the year of the world seventeen hundred and thirteen, which is only fifty-seven years later than the generally received date of the deluge of Moses.

"The emperor Yaou said: 'Vast and destructive are the accumulating waters, which having overflowed their banks, rise so high as to cover the hills, and overtop the loftiest mountains, while they are co-extensive with the spacious concave of heaven. Alas for the mass of the people; who shall relieve them from their calamities?' All replied, 'Behold, Kwăn!' 'Ah no; it cannot be;' answered his majesty; 'he opposes the commands of his superiors, and subverts the nine classes of kindred.' It was remarked by the ministers, 'That is doubtful, try him; perhaps he may succeed.' The emperor said, 'Let him go, then; but be cautious.' He was engaged nine years without accomplishing his task, and eventually atoned for the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Pl 1

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
UNIV. OF MICH.


Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

failure by his death. Yu, his son, was next employed, who perfected the great work of removing the flood, and restoring order to the empire. The following dialogue, on the subject of his labours, occurred between Yu and his sovereign. The emperor says, 'Approach the imperial presence, you have abundant communications to make.' Yu worshipped, and said, 'May it please your majesty, how can I speak? My thoughts were unweariedly and incessantly employed day by day. The deluge rose high, and spread wide as the spacious vault of heaven; buried the hills and covered the mountains with its waters, into which the common people, astonished to stupefaction, sunk. I travelled on dry land in a chariot, on water in a boat, in miry places on a sledge, and climbed the sides of hills by means of spikes in my shoes. I went from mountain to mountain felling trees; fed the people with raw food; formed a passage for the waters to the sea on every part of the empire, by cutting nine distinct beds and preparing channels to conduct them to the rivers. The waters having subsided, I taught the people to plough and sow, who, while the devastating effects of the flood continued, were constrained to eat uncooked food. I urged them to barter such things as they could spare for others of which they stood in need. In this way the people were fed, and ten thousand provinces restored to order and prosperity. May your majesty now be attentive to the duties and honours of the throne, and rest in the highest point of virtuous government. Think of the secret springs of action. Meditate with delight on supreme excellence. See that your ministers are upright. Rouse them to answer great expectations, and watch the bent of their minds; so will you render indubitable proof

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

that your authority is derived from the supreme ruler. Heaven has invested you anew with its commands; employ your influence to excite admiration and praise.' 'Ministers,' said the sovereign, 'are my legs and arms, ears and eyes; I desire you, my attendant officers of state, to take charge of the people, and render effective aid. Proclaim my authority to the four quarters of the world, and see it respected. Examine representations of things made by the ancients. The sun, moon, stars, and constellations, mountains, dragons, flowers, and insects, must be painted in groups. Variegated colours in embroidery must be blended to diffuse the five natural colours, blue, red, yellow, white, and black, in external ornaments for dresses; do you explain my wishes. I desire to hear the laws and notes and sounds of music; do you quickly examine and adjust them, that you may issue my orders. Be attentive. If I am in error, correct me. Do not obey in my presence, and reproach me when you retire. Respect the ministers of state. The common people are stupid and slanderous. If they neglect their duty in proper season, be careful to enlighten them. Impress instruction on their memories by blows, and exercise their understandings by writing. I desire that they may live in equal circumstances. Promote industry by my authority, and in proper season. If the people come, assist and employ them; but if they are unwilling, use intimidation.' Yu assented, and replied, 'The emperor enlightens the universe. His illuminating influence extends to the inhabitants of every nook, to the utmost boundaries of the sea, and to the black-haired sacrificers of ten thousand provinces. Only your majesty must be attentive to your ministers. When they are promoted,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

let them diffuse instruction in language, and illuminate the people by virtuous examples. Let chariots and official garments be in constant use, and then who will dare to refuse submission? who will presume at any time to disobey your majesty? Let instructions be published as soon as they are received, and a report made of the unworthy.' "

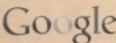
On the death of this emperor, in his hundred and second year, the empire did not revert to his son, but to Shun, who forthwith ascended the imperial throne. His fame first reached his predecessor in the sixtieth year of his age. His filial piety, for which he became so eminently distinguished, was severely tried after the death of his mother, by the inhuman treatment of his father, who, having married again, loved his second wife's children, and hated Shun, whom he not only punished for the most trivial faults, but sought to slay. His step-mother was deceitful, and his younger brother proud; yet his submission and love never sunk below the correct standard. He was dutiful to his parents, and tenderly affectionate to his brother. He cultivated reverence and seriousness until his virtues eventually united his family in harmony, and averted those calamities which their crimes were hastening. Such was his reputation for filial obedience, that when he went to plough at the age of twenty, all the inhabitants of the district where he resided yielded him precedence; similar honours were rendered by fishermen and potters among whom he lived and laboured. He successively raised by his industrious exertions a village, a town, and a city. In the Shoo-king it is said, " If you examine the character of the ancient monarch Shun, you will perceive that it resembles that of his royal prede-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

cessor. He was distinguished by profound wisdom, acute intelligence, ornamental and splendid virtues, an amiable and grave deportment, faithfulness and sincerity. From the report of his excellencies, the emperor appointed him to official duties, that he might prove his talents and virtues, and observe his capacity for business. Being able to exemplify the five constant virtues—benevolence, justice, decorum, wisdom, and sincerity—he was promoted to the office of superintending the servants of government, and afterwards created master of ceremonies, on whom it devolved to introduce nobles of the empire at court when they came to do homage for their territories. Commanded by his majesty to explore the recesses of a large forest, and examine the sources of an inundation, he was overtaken by a tremendous storm of thunder and rain, which occasioned general alarm for his safety; but he displayed the superiority of his genius, in escaping without loss of self-possession from dangers which would have overwhelmed ordinary men. Of courage and capacity so unequivocally manifested, the emperor could no longer refrain from expressing his admiration, and rendering an adequate reward. Having therefore summoned Shun to an audience, he thus addressed him: 'I have fully scrutinized your character, rigorously tested your plans for conducting important affairs, and carefully investigated your deliberative councils; I now, therefore, in consideration of your meritorious exertions, declare that three years hence you shall ascend the imperial throne.' Shun humbly declined the honour in favour of one more worthy, and further alleged his want of posterity as an impediment to hereditary succession. His objections, however, being overruled, he assumed the cares and re-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

sponsibility of government from Yaou in the ancestral temple. He examined astronomical instruments for the purpose of adjusting the seven ruling powers — the sun and moon; Venus, or the gold star; Jupiter, or the wood star; Mercury, or the water star; Mars, or the fire star; and Saturn, or the earth star — names borrowed from the constituent parts of the earth to illustrate the properties of the most remarkable planets." Allusion is made to a kind of planetarium, made of stone, to represent the motion of the heavens; and to an instrument for observing celestial phenomena. The former is said to be adorned with costly pearls, the latter with diamonds: their names, literally translated from Chinese, are, "the beautiful pearl revolver, and the diamond quadrant." A plate of this instrument is given in the nineteenth volume of an imperial work on astronomy. Shun undertook astronomical duties as first in importance on assuming imperial authority. A great sacrifice was offered to the supreme ruler; one of lesser value, denominated "pure," was presented to the six objects of universal honour—the four seasons, and the male and female power in nature, Yin and Yang: offerings were also dedicated to mountains and rivers, and a tour of respect performed to the whole circle of deities. He collected the five stone seals, which were anciently distributed among the nobles as tokens of security for their faithfulness; had an interview with the local magistrates, and bestowed seals of office on the assembled princes. He undertook a tour of inspection through the different provinces of his empire; promoted uniformity in the revolutions of the seasons by establishing fixed laws; regulated the ceremonies to be observed in prosperity and adversity, military discipline, the rites of

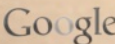
Digitized by 

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

hospitality and marriage, fixed the five valuable stones, which denoted the rank of the nobles; the three pieces of silk, which, being three times dyed in scarlet, constituted their badge of distinction; the two living sacrifices and one dead victim which were to be offered as presents by officers according to their grade. When he had completed the first of his tours, which were made east, south, west, and north, once in five years, he returned to the temple of ancestors and offered bullocks in sacrifice. Then the princes from the four quarters of the empire assembled at court, and presented statements to their sovereign, who with illustrious wisdom examined them by the standard of meritorious exertion, and rewarded the deserving with chariots and robes. He instituted laws with penal sanctions, and relaxed the severity of the five punishments: these consisted in branding the criminal's face with ink, cutting off the nose, taking away the knee-pan, mutilation, and death; for which were substituted flogging, applicable to officers of government; beating, to schoolmasters who neglected their duty; gold, to crimes whose punishment might be commuted for money; in many instances alleviating natural calamities, and exercising his prerogative of mercy by distributing pardons: death was, however, still decreed to murderers and robbers. "Respect this: respect this! and punish offenders tenderly," were the closing injunctions of his majesty's edict. Having transported three criminals, and put to death Kwăn, who failed to remove the waters of the deluge from the earth, tranquillity was restored to the empire. In the twenty-eighth year of Shun's reign, Yaou died, as a leaf falls from the tree and fades away. The people mourned over him as over a parent for three

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

years; and music was prohibited throughout the territories over which he had reigned. Shun, on the first of the first month, went to the temple of ancestors, and commanded his attendants to throw open the gates of the court, make proclamation to the intelligent and discerning throughout the empire, and invite honest men to enter the service of government. He instructed each governor of the twelve districts into which his territory was divided to supply the people with suitable food in its proper season, to bring distant strangers near by tenderness of treatment, to reverence outward virtue, to be faithful to sound principles, and to exercise forbearance under difficult circumstances; then barbarians would all yield submission. He, moreover, inquired who was able to spread abroad the principles of the golden medium, and render illustrious the annals of their sovereign. Nine officers of government were immediately appointed; among whom Yu, who repaired wastes and disorders occasioned by the deluge, was elevated to the station of prime minister; the next in rank presided over the agricultural department; the third, was president of the board of instruction; the fourth, criminal judge; the fifth, director of public works; the sixth, commissioner of woods and forests, or, more literally, mountains and marshes, with a special injunction to take care of the imperial park; the seventh, master of religious rites in the temple of ancestors, on whom it devolved to see proper ceremonies observed, and the gods worshipped according to rank and precedence; the eighth, superintendent of music, whom the emperor enjoined to instruct his eldest son, and to be sincere, but mild; benignant, and withal firm; unyielding, yet not tyrannical; and great without pride. "Poetry," said he, "is the

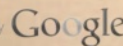

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

language of the heart; the expressions of song are eternal; its sounds never fail; its notes and laws combine harmoniously, without interruption or discord: music has the power of uniting men and gods in mutual concord." His minister remarked, "If I were to play upon sonorous stones, the very beasts of the forest would respond to my music by dancing;" like another Orpheus, who by the sweetness of his song allured woods and rocks, with their animated inhabitants, to follow him: the ninth, promulgator of imperial edicts, to whom his majesty declared, "I hate slanderous speech and cruel conduct which agitate and alarm my people. I require you, morning and evening, to issue my commands: only be faithful." In his second year, the emperor sought persons of virtue and talent to become imperial censors, who should assist him in the correct discharge of his duties, by a faithful representation of his foibles and imperfections. He examined his servants once in three years, to excite their attention, on the principle that human nature, when liberal, must enlarge its beneficence, and when excessively stern must relax its severity. Those who had sunk into obscurity by want of exertion he degraded, and promoted such as had rendered themselves eminent by virtuous deeds, rewarding or punishing according to intelligence and truth. Shun spent thirty years of his life in private; thirty in an official station; sat upon the throne fifty; and died at the age of an hundred and ten years.

If the character of the ancient illustrious Yu be examined, it will be seen in his aiding the emperor to diffuse instruction throughout his dominions. It is said, princes are able to sympathize in the troubles of princes; mi-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

nisters can appreciate the difficulties of ministers. Government is powerful; the people respect virtue. The emperor says, "Be sincere and complaisant. Let your words be excellent without tediousness. Subdue rustics without exposing the virtuous, and all lands will live in harmony. Extend your investigations to the people at large. Sacrifice your own interests to promote the good of others. Refrain from tyrannical behaviour towards those who have none to speak for them. Do not distress the wearied and exhausted. The emperor only possesses ability at all times." Yih says, "May it please your majesty, your virtue, Sire, revolves in an extended circle. You are holy; you are divine; you are a military and civil ruler. Imperial Heaven's high behests have decreed to you the dominion of the four seas: your majesty is constituted prince of the earthly territory." Yu says, "As the shadow follows its substance, and the echo reverberates the sound, so surely will felicity attend the virtuous, and misery overtake the rebellious." Yih says, "Guard against unforeseen evils; do not fail to respect the laws. Abstain from voluptuous ramblings, and lascivious sounds of music. Be sincerely virtuous, not double-minded. Abandon depraved practices without hesitation; and discard doubtful plans. In all your anxieties for prosperity be luminous. Do not resist good principles for the sake of acquiring popular praise, nor oppose the people to promote selfish gratification. Be neither haughty nor extravagant, and barbarians from all quarters will come under your gentle sway." Yu says, "According to the emperor's reflections, virtue is chiefly displayed in good government, which consists in nurturing the people, cultivating each of the original elements—water, fire, metal, wood, earth, and

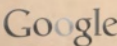

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

grain, and uniting together in harmony a correct moral deportment, an economical use of essentials, and proper respect for life. These nine praiseworthy acts should be celebrated in song according to their order and importance. Instruct with mildness, rule with authority, and exhort in verse that impending ruin may be averted."

The emperor says, "Well; earth is adjusted, and heaven is completed. The six physical elements and three important moral principles, guided by a sincere government, will give eternal repose to ten thousand ages, during which there will be a constant succession of meritorious deeds. I now elevate you to my royal pavilion and imperial seat; I have reigned thirty-three years, and at the age of ninety am wearied with diligent study. See that you rule my people without pride." Yu says, "My virtue is inadequate to the task. I cannot inspire the people with confidence. Kaou-Taou is supereminent in virtue, and will diffuse its benignant influences among the people, whose hearts will cherish it. Oh, let the emperor deliberate; oh, think of this man. Select him. Fame speaks of him. Sincerity recommends him. May your majesty reflect on his merit." The emperor replied, "Kaou-Taou is only the minister of the people; do not mention him. Go you and discharge your official duties correctly. Illustrate the five kinds of punishment, originally instituted to aid instruction, and abolish the necessity of inflictions. Promote harmony among the people, the centre of which is the golden medium; whose meritorious works will then be seasonable, and their minds fully engaged in virtuous actions." Kaou-Taou says, "The emperor's virtue is free from defect or error. He carries himself towards inferiors with condescension and grace,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

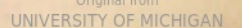
governs the multitude on generous principles, nor suffers punishments to affect immediate posterity, though he transmits rewards of virtue to distant ages. Where transgressions are not heinous he bestows pardon, and inflicts punishments only for heavy crimes. An alleged offence of doubtful character he considers trivial, but dubious merit meets with an important recompense. He would rather the law should be infringed with impunity than that an innocent man should suffer. Tender regard for human life is a virtue which deeply imbues the minds of his subjects, who are hence careful not to offend against constituted authorities." "Your praise," said his majesty, "has no other effect than to stimulate my natural desire to exercise beneficent government, and to diffuse salutary influences among the people by a gracious example." Addressing Yu, he said, "When the devastating waters terrified me, you perfected your claim to sincerity and faithfulness by the accomplishment of renowned deeds. Virtue and ability to serve your country with diligence, and to practise economy in domestic matters, rests with you alone. Without self-sufficiency or ostentatious, hypocritical pretensions, you stand pre-eminent in moral worth. No subject will dispute unconquerable power, or contend against unrivalled success. The object of my encouragement is moral excellence; the theme of my praise, distinguished merit. Numbers, which determine the movements of the heavenly bodies, depend for their arrangement on your person. You must ascend the imperial throne. There is nothing more dangerous than the human mind, nothing more subtle than the principles of reason. Analyze them with the utmost delicacy of attention and singleness of purpose, that you

Digitized by  Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

may sincerely apprehend and faithfully preserve the due medium. Neither listen to words which evince want of discrimination; nor adopt plans destitute of sage counsel. No object of love can be dearer to a people than their prince, nor can a prince's fears be roused except by his subjects. Whom will the multitude respect if they do not venerate their sovereign? and how can a prince defend his territories except in conjunction with his people? Consider these things. Carefully uphold the dignity of the throne. Let your respect and care surpass the most ardent expectations in times of public distress, and Heaven will vouchsafe eternal prosperity. Out of the mouth alone proceeds peace or war. My words shall not be repeated." Yu replied, "Meritorious ministers must be sought by divination, and felicitous omens attentively regarded." The emperor commands: "Examine the appearances of the prognostic; but conceal your previous purposes, and let the decree be regulated by the indications of the great tortoise. My inclination is pre-determined; all its deliberations and schemes agree; demons and gods accord with them; the tortoise and spells harmoniously unite.* Divination is not habitually felicitous." Yu worshipped, bowed his head, and would have firmly refused the honour; but the emperor insisted on his acquiescence.

In the first month of the year, Yu received Heaven's decrees in the divine sanctuary, at the head of all state officers, according to the ceremony observed when his present majesty assumed the government, by whom he was admonished to consider constantly the state of the

* For illustration of this sentiment see chapter on Divination.

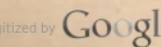

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Meaou,* not to become their leader, but to subjugate them. Yu and the assembled princes of the empire administered an oath to the soldiers, whom his majesty thus admonished: "Ye numerous multitudes, listen to my commands. Those Meaou are doltish, stupid, and confused, destitute of reverence, contemptuous, self-righteous tribes, who oppose divine reason, and subvert the principles of moral excellence. According to their notions, the mean man occupies the throne, and the philosopher dwells only among rustics. Such people are accursed, placed beyond the pale of protection, and fit objects of divine vengeance. I charge you all, in these instructions, with the punishment of transgressors. Mental power consists in unity of purpose, which is the source and strength of official merit."

During thirty days the Meaou opposed government edicts. Yih presented a congratulatory address to the Emperor, saying, "Heaven is acted upon by virtue alone, to whose influence no limit can be assigned. Self-sufficiency incurs suffering, humility is fraught with blessings. Undeviating constancy marks the pathway of Heaven. The emperor† commenced his virtuous career in Leih Shan, where, as he went to his daily labour, he invoked the mournful heavens, weeping audibly, on behalf of his parents, whose sins he would fain bear on his own back, and thus expiate. He had an interview with his old blind father, which was conducted on his part with gravity and reverence, fear and trembling; while the parent, melted by such filial tenderness into complacency and

* A tribe of mountaineers, supposed to be the aborigines of China, who are still a distinct people.

† *i. e.* Shun.


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

respect, with the utmost sincerity gave thanks to the gods: and if he was so overcome by one who had been obnoxious to him, how much more will these wild mountaineers submit to the authority of your majesty?" Yu respectfully bowed to these splendid sayings, and said, "Marshal my armies, and arrange the tribes in order. If his majesty diffuses instruction, extends ornamental learning and virtue, and encourages such court amusements as dancing, fencing, and the masquerade, which will sustain suitable rank between host and guest, in seventy days the Meaou will yield entire submission." Kaou-Taou's counsels are: "Tread sincerely in the paths of virtue. Devise intelligent plans, and procure harmonious ministers." To the inquiry of Yu, how these things might be accomplished, he replied: "By diligent attention to personal habits, and ceaseless efforts to improve the understanding. Sincerely respect the nine degrees of consanguinity. The people around you being illumined, and treated with cordiality, those who are distant will feel the benign influence of your gracious conduct. Prosperity depends on three things — acquaintance with human nature; a tranquil government; and obedience to the order of the seasons. The emperor alone knows the difficulties which attend these duties. A correct knowledge of mankind involves intuitive wisdom, and an able, pacific government embraces principles of genuine benevolence. When ability, intelligence, and goodness preside over a flourishing community, from what source can trouble arise? Why abdicate the throne for the sake of the Meaou? Why fear deceitful words, a specious countenance, and a fair exterior? Virtuous conduct is divisible into nine orders of human excellencies: bene-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

volence tempered with sternness, gentleness with decision, sincerity with reverential feeling, love of propriety with external respect, sedateness with magnanimity; a straightforward but conciliating deportment; generosity without extravagance; bravery united with solidity, and fearlessness with justice. O how auspicious will be the reign in which all these virtues are constantly illustrated! Daily proclaim the three virtues, that the magistrates may morning and evening exemplify them. Sternly venerate and respect the six virtues. Enlighten the nobles. Cherish harmony and diffuse instruction. The nine virtues are adequate to comprehend every affair. Talent and ability should distinguish officers of government, whose province it is to direct the multitude. Workmen should labour in due season, and in harmony with the five elements, and then the whole routine of meritorious deeds will be accomplished. Impart no instruction to wandering rakes, who desire to obtain the government of a province for their own gratification. The prince must be attentive to his duties, and guard against the ten thousand circumstances which come daily before him. He must not be unmindful of public servants. Labourers are employed by heaven, on behalf of which the emperor rules. Laws attached to the celestial orders comprise bonds subsisting between prince and minister, father and son, younger and elder brother, husband and wife, and mutual friends, which agree with our five precepts and five objects of veneration. How useful are the ordinances of heaven, derived from ours, and consummated in union and reverence and perfect harmony! The decrees of heaven favour the excellent. Heaven punishes the guilty according to our five penal

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

inflictions, and five kinds of transportations. O how magnificent are the affairs of government! The perspicacity and intelligence of heaven accord with the perspicacity and intelligence of my people; its intelligent fear agrees with their illustrious veneration, and diffuses itself through the upper and lower ranks of society. Oh, what respect is due to officers of government!"

The reader has been detained longer on these translations than their intrinsic excellence perhaps would warrant; because, while the sentiments conveyed are of remote origin, they support an immense fabric of political power and social influence raised by the government of China on the ruins of natural liberty, and cemented by degrading superstitions, moral debasement, and mental servitude, which mark the present condition of her multitudinous inhabitants. If we ascribe any real existence to the ancient chieftains who have passed under review, they must be considered as belonging to the infantile population of the world. Their system of instruction bears characteristics of originality, both melancholy and interesting. It is divested of all dependence on revealed communications respecting the early state of man; and yet, amidst the vagaries of superstition and the seductions of error, truth faintly indicates its native dignity and majesty. The first remarkable point of attention is, a selfish seclusion in which they enwrap themselves, without a thought that other human beings might claim a kindred origin, or that it was of any moment whence barbarians had sprung, who occupy the outskirts of the celestial territory. Their contemptuous sovereignty over all being forbids admission to the principle that nations descended from the same source must be equal in dignity of origin,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and if now degraded in the scale of creation their progenitors cannot but share the imputed debasement; or that if of independent descent, which is more in accordance with Chinese theory, it may, in all probability, be equally honourable. Heaven and earth are immediately concerned in their own origin, with which they identify the commencement of human operations; and the first person to whom mortal reign is entrusted was mysteriously united to the unknown something which produced, pervades, and controls the visible universe. Their doctrine of a First Cause seems to have given rise to the idea of sovereignty in one person, or rather, was it not invented to sanction his authority? since he professes to take heaven and earth as his pattern, and employs the phrase "Father heaven," and "Mother earth," to denote the conjoint sources of his power and influence, from which he derives the appellation Heaven's Son as his characteristic title. Heaven, according to this system, is especially attentive to the conduct of human beings, while its purposes may be changed, its decrees reversed, and its determination to punish revoked by incessant exertions of virtuous beings on earth in resolute persevering penitence; but if justice with regard to great criminals be long delayed, or not allowed to follow its natural and righteous course, a way is equally opened for the judgment of heaven to descend, as when distinguished excellence is not adequately rewarded. Their idea of the world, a term applied to their own territory, is that of a family under the governance of one irresponsible head, which constitutes the basis of their theory of government. He is said to reign, either in conjunction with heaven, or by its authority, or as its deputy to fulfil its commands,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

execute its penal decisions, and by his virtuous influence sway the destinies of its subjects. The period which we have been contemplating, includes what the Chinese denominate the highest and upper antiquity,—two out of three periods which come between the fabulous age and that of Confucius: the first comprises the imperial heaven, earth and man's reign, which extends to the times of Fuh-he, who lived above eleven hundred and forty years before Yaou's deluge; the second, from Fuh-he to Yaou, who flourished seventeen hundred years before Confucius, whose age is the boundary of the third or last division of antiquity, which preceded the Christian æra by five hundred years. In this latter period the catastrophe of the deluge occurred, from whose survivors a description of it was transmitted by tradition to all parts of the world, as we learn from nations early accustomed to record their own origin and progress. Some expressions in the Shoo-king are remarkably similar to those of the Mosaic narrative: both accounts represent the flood as gradually rising above the highest mountains. The Chinese, however, do not allude to the sources of this calamity, nor to the resting-place of the people during the prevalence of the waters. Yu—their Noah—is celebrated for his painful and successful labour in directing the waters to their proper channels, and laying out the country in districts to be cultivated and taxed agreeably to the quality of the soil. Names are appended to the supposed scene of his exertions with tedious minuteness; but no modern observations or researches can discover the locality of those nine boundaries into which, according to ancient tradition, he divided the empire. The term "nine regions," which is still applied to the Chinese empire, has been derived,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

together with the fiction of the actors in the scene, from obscured remnants of scripture fact, disseminated by Noah and his family among their descendants. Yu is said to have been so intent upon his work, that during his employment in adjusting the waters he thrice passed his own door without entering it, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of his son and the entreaties of his wife. He is therefore celebrated in the writings of philosophers as a pattern of self-denial. In the time of Yu wine was first made by E-Teih; but when Yu drank of it and relished its flavour, he banished its maker, and prohibited the luxury, remarking, that in future ages nations would be ruined by it. "*At this period heaven rained down gold for three days:*" this absurd statement as a grave historical fact probably took its rise from the element by which Yu reigned, which was metal or gold. He died at the age of one hundred years.

The following inferences seem to be fairly deducible from the preceding statements.

First, irrespective of the absurd statements of the fabulous æra, the Chinese monarchy is of very high antiquity; secondly, though the succession to the throne be hereditary, an eminently virtuous subject was in ancient times frequently preferred to a profligate heir; thirdly, the practice of the sovereigns of that remote period, in raising a successor to the throne during their own lifetime, has been imitated in modern times, as, for example, by Keên-lung, who, having reigned sixty-one years, resigned the throne to its next heir; fourthly, though the events narrated above are no doubt indebted for many particulars to the writers of later times, the sentiments and conduct of those ancient chieftains have been revered in all sub-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

sequent ages, as models of virtuous government and practice; fifthly, the tradition of the deluge, so nearly resembling that of Moses in description and chronology, corroborates our faith in the sacred narrative, and evinces the high antiquity of Chinese records. Some have, indeed, attempted to prove that the account in the Shoo-king refers only to a local inundation produced by excessive rains; but both natives and foreigners have been much perplexed to explain its causes, and the means of removing it; moreover, it would be unlikely that such peculiar expressions should be applied to what, at least in ancient times, was no uncommon occurrence, if nothing more were intended by the writer than to describe a periodical overflow of some river. Sixthly, the Meaou-tsze, referred to in the extracts from the Shoo-king, still exist in the heart of China, occupying its mountains and fastnesses, whence they occasionally issue to make irruptions on the inhabitants of the plain. Is not this a strong circumstance in favour of the opinion that they are the aborigines?

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SECTION III.

THE THREE SECTS—SENTIMENTS ON THE FIRST CAUSE—NATURE OF THEIR DIFFERENT SYSTEMS—PRACTICAL INFLUENCE.

FABLES, metaphysical disquisitions, and simple narrative, are so blended together in Chinese histories, that it is difficult to ascertain their respective limits. In the former chapter we described ancient worthies, who have been held in devout esteem from time immemorial through successive ages, for the excellent principles they adopted for their own guidance, and enforced on the observance of others. This was evidently the golden age of the Chinese. Allusions were there made to the First Cause, and to the origin of the world, which will now be discussed.

The original, abstract, principle of causation, denominated Tae-keih, is represented in Chinese authors by a circle, or by a circle enclosing a waving line from the top to the bottom, which is also an ancient symbol of the sun. When this principle was in motion, it produced a male power, and when it was at rest a female power; from whose united operations four visible forms were generated, which represent, by eight diagrams, innumerable combinations and transmutations in nature, resembling the Pythagorean system of accounting for the origin of the universe. Tae-keih means the great limit, or extreme principle of analysis, which is one and indivisible; yet

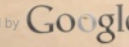
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

diffused throughout nature by necessary existence;—a sort of Pantheism, and yet not divided. *Oneness* is its only property in common with the God of Divine Revelation, except the notion of infinitude or eternity may be supposed to attach to the phrase Woo-keih, no limit, employed by other writers to express the same idea. Neither of the terms, however, indicates natural or moral perfection—not even the attribute of intelligence or wisdom—so graciously suited to man's guilt and dependence—so honourable and glorious to God in his revealed character; while the properties of benevolence and mercy are without shadow of representation in this baseless fabric. Truth—supported by the eternal sanctions of holiness and justice, which shed a heavenly light around its moral beauty, and distinguished by the wisdom of its communications, the unchangeableness of its purposes, and the amplitude of its provision for man as an immortal being—is unrepresented, except in the fictions of a vain imagination, and the reasonings of debased intellect. Holiness, such as it is described to be in this system, is destitute of living perfection, and unconnected with deeds of infinite purity; consequently, it strikes no salutary terror into the guilty mind. Justice, unattended with penal sanctions, based on the known determination of the Judge of all the earth to do right, excites no lively apprehension of future retribution. Wisdom and power, limited to the operation of mere abstract existences, bearing the name without the substance of properties appropriate only to the eternal God, furnish subjects of unintelligible declamation to the ignorant, and of profound mysticism to inquiring minds, in which they are perplexed and confounded.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The dual power, evolved from this original principle, was the next order of existence generated, prior to the production of all things. It was denominated Yin and Yang, terms which signify male (Yang), and female (Yin), "light and darkness, perfection and imperfection, manifestation and obscurity, good and evil, the source of existence and the cause of decay;" and may be said to bear some resemblance to the two ancient principles in nature, which the Manichæans recognized as the origin of all the virtue and vice prevalent on earth. Other influences and acts, attributed to these primary energies, are not dissimilar to those which the ancient Egyptians ascribed to their two principal deities, Osis and Osiris. These, it will be remembered, are appropriated by that people to the sun and moon.* For if, as it has been supposed, the Egyptians derived some of their immoral practices, such as their incestuous marriages, from the depraved example instituted by the gods, so it is equally probable that many of the licentious abominations and cruel practices of the Chinese are referrible to the sexual intercourse alleged to subsist between this male and female power in nature; the result of whose conjoined operations is not only seen in the productions, animate and inanimate, of the air, the earth, and the sea, but, moreover, in the influence which the theory exercises over their whole social system. Every thing masculine is invested with the highest excellence, every thing feminine treated with the most contemptuous disdain. Arts, ceremonies, accomplishments, and the ordinary intercourse of life, ought to be regulated by this fancied two-fold division of the Supreme Power. Printing uses its masculine

* See preceding chapter.


Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and feminine letter according to prescribed rules. The notes of music are divided into male and female, and require to be properly blended, according to the principles of Yin and Yang, before their combination can produce complete harmony. In the preparation of a feast the respective pre-eminence and subordination of these powers is distinguished, by the inferior dishes occupying the place appropriated to Yin, and the superior that which belongs to Yang. Passing the distinctions created by this theory, to the prejudice of the female in favour of the male among animals, its influence may be noticed as most injurious to the feminine part of the human species. It certainly countenances, if it did not originate, female infanticide; for while the design to avoid the care and expense of bringing up children may be considered as the primary motive, yet why do not sons participate with daughters in a common fate, if there be no assignable ground of preference for one sex more than the other? And where life is spared, the same sentiment dooms the female to subjection and degradation, as possessed of inferior powers of mind, and of immeasurably less importance in the scale of being than man. This notion need not excite much surprise, since the male power in nature receives various designations descriptive of eminence, and the female invariably those which denote inferiority. If, for example, the term which denotes the male power be supreme heaven, the counterpart to this will be subordinate earth, as expressive of the female. The superior of these powers, by whatever name it is distinguished, rules in heaven and controls celestial objects, while the inferior, which is the female, governs on earth and directs terrestrial things. The term by which the Chinese de-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

signate the gods, spirits, and good angels, is said to be the soul of the male power; while that which distinguishes the animating principle of the female, is applied to demons and evil spirits. The same word Shin, when used to denote a kind of ethereal essence, has its respondent inferior element, denominated Ke, "breath or vapour." Indeed, whatever exists in the universe is the property of the one or other of these elementary powers, and has its corresponding office in the social and physical economy. This theory, moreover, affects the moral systems of the Chinese, virtues and vices in their various classes being arranged according to this fanciful division of the originating powers.

The theory of a triad power uniting in one essence to create all things, and separating into distinct personages successively to rule the world in its first ages, has exercised considerable influence over the religious systems now prevailing in China; and why should it be thought improbable that some at least of these notions, though now enveloped in the grossest error, were originally derived from revealed facts, through the darkened medium of tradition? Pagan countries advanced beyond barbarism, embody superstitious tenets in their religious code, varying in character according to the degree of civilization and refinement to which they have attained. In the absence of an infallible standard of faith, the principles and precepts of which are recognized as altogether obligatory, systems of restraint must be devised to aid the authority of rulers, and secure the subordination of subjects; to attract the thoughtful few, who scrutinize the causes of things, and satisfy the unthinking many, who seek the gratification of sense, regardless whether those legends

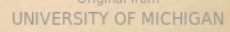
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

on which their enjoyments rest, agree or disagree with the principles of reason.

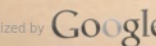
The designations *philosophical, fabulous,* and *political,* applied to the prevailing forms of superstition in China, may serve to point out their distinctions; although neither of these appellations is exclusively appropriate to any one of the Chinese systems, of which, it is well known, the three principal are, the sect of *Reason,* the sect of *Fŭh,* and the sect of the *Learned.* Confucius's ethics are, indeed, with propriety designated political; but they also involve pretensions to moral philosophy and metaphysical learning. Buddhism patronises childish and absurd ceremonies, but intermingles therewith the doctrines of the sages. The sect of Reason, with a title which promises exercise to metaphysical acumen, has its mystic fables and topical deities to gratify the feelings of the people. Since these sects are recognized by the state, and their votaries constitute almost the entire mass of its subjects, I cannot, perhaps, in pursuance of my plan, more advantageously represent the moral and intellectual condition of China, than by incorporating the floating sentiments of tradition, on the three great powers of nature, now the subjects of historic record, together with the opinions held respecting each of these primary energies by the "Three Sects," for the purpose of exhibiting at one view various notions of Heaven as the First Cause, of Earth as the second, and of Man as the third.

The sect of Taou, Reason, was founded by Laou-keun-tsze, who flourished about five hundred years prior to the Christian æra, and was contemporary with Confucius. It uses remarkable language to indicate the origin of its founder. He is described as the great, supreme,

Digitized by Google


Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

three-fold source, consisting of three personages, of whom the most honourable dwells in heaven bestowing happiness; the next in rank grants forgiveness of sin on earth; while the inferior rules the waters, and delivers from impending calamities: yet these three sages are but one first cause—that is, the one indivisible monad, to which we have already referred, called Tae-keih. This triune power presiding in heaven over assembled divinities and rulers, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations, despatches a celestial messenger to announce the pardon of sin, infinite happiness, and complete deliverance from evil, to all who shall recite his precious name with many magnificent epithets superadded. He is considered as the restorer of reason, who has by incarnation assumed some form or other in seven different periods, from the highest antiquity down to the æra of his residence on earth, and subsequently as late as the sixth century. Other deities are worshipped; such as the supreme ruler, the northern emperor, the god of fire, the god of births; but the principal divinities are the "three pure ones," united in one abstract essence, of which eternal reason is the basis and characteristic. This principle resembles in several particulars the λόγος of the Greeks, as it has been explained by the school of Plato. It not only, in order of existence, preceded the heavens and the earth, but is also regarded as the creating source of matter; and seems, likewise, not dissimilar to the pervading principle of that philosopher, which inheres in matter and animates living beings. The Scripture reader will recognize in these opinions remnants of revealed truth, obscured indeed and mutilated by tradition as accumulating ages separated the members of the human family from the only correct source



Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of information, but still not without traces of original verity.

The sect of Füh also recognizes "three precious ones," as the supreme object of adoration; these are—the past, the present, and the future; a sort of divided eternity, deified without reference to personal attributes or perfections, either moral or natural, except infinite existence be regarded as the essence of this three-fold period. It was introduced from India about the close of the first century after Christ; but since it acknowledges gods many and lords many, no light is reflected on the character and communications of a Supreme Being. Its principal divinities are goddesses; one of whom is represented with many arms, indicative of her power to save; another is the patroness of childless women, and holds an infant before her; a third superintends children who are ill of the small-pox; a fourth is the goddess of mercy, which is in the highest degree popular; together with innumerable other feigned deities, presiding over individual, local, and national interests, all which combine to stifle the voice of natural conscience, shroud the human understanding with impenetrable darkness, and destroy those moral sensibilities which might have been excited and cherished by meditating on the works of creation, on the ways of Providence, and on traditional information derived from the original depositaries of God's will. The mysticism of the former sect and the absurdities of this, are equally erroneous; but the latter being more popular, possesses greater power of doing mischief. No idea of God approaching to correctness has been retained, since the outlines of truth, communicated by the immediate descendants of Noah, were effaced from the minds of their

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

posterity; nor, independently of Divine revelation, have correct sentiments of God ever been acquired; even where reason, with all its boasted sufficiency of wisdom, has been invoked as the tutelary deity. And if notions of God worthy in some degree of his character and perfections be not impressed on the human mind, we look in vain, not only for rational deportment from man towards the Supreme Being, but also for suitable behaviour to his fellow-man in the varied duties of life. The wisest pagan nations afford convincing evidence of the truth of this statement. Egypt, renowned throughout the ancient world for its wisdom, the extent of which is noticed by inspiration, multiplied its objects of worship from animals and vegetables, until nature itself teemed with deities. China, apart though it has long been from intercourse with Christian countries—is thought by some to be a model of excellence in its simple patriarchal worship; but it has evidently been extolled without reason; since its paternal character, apparent in outward forms, is really merged either in idolatrous superstitions or atheistical materialism. Thus, in these two illustrious instances, China and Egypt, wisdom with regard to the character of the First Cause, has degenerated into folly of the most unseemly kind, affording additional testimony to the important truth, that "the world by wisdom knew not God."

The sentiments of Confucius, whose philosophy is usually considered both as more rational and more practical than that of Laou-tsze, with whom he was contemporary, are very peculiar with regard to the First Cause, which he variously designates reason, heaven, supreme ruler, supreme heaven, and heaven and earth. The indiscriminate

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

application of these terms to widely different objects and systems, creates considerable confusion in the mind of the uninitiated reader. Taou, which may be called the Logos of China, in addition to the sense already adverted to, as belonging to the first of the three sects, is employed by the Buddhists to point out a particular state of existence, relating to the metempsychosis, whether among human beings or brutes. Confucius and his followers, who constitute the sect of the learned, attribute more epithets descriptive of an eternal being to Taou, than to any other term by which the Chinese denote the first cause. It is represented as eternal, unchangeable, creative, omnipresent—so vast that it fills the universe, so minute that it is contained in all things. It is the source of the changes which occur in nature, and takes precedence of heaven and earth; and in comparison with it not only man, but these creative powers also, are liable to err, and by their aberrations to violate its authority. In the mundane system of the Chinese it is elevated into a divinity, whence issued heaven, earth, man, and all natural objects; still, however, it is not invested with personal properties. The same word signifies a way or path, both morally and physically, which, preceded by heaven (heaven's path), indicates the Supreme Being's procedure towards mankind, and conveys an idea approaching to the Christian's notion of Divine Providence. This term with the sense—method of access—ascribed to it, coupled with its alleged prerogative as the source of all things, animate and inanimate, indicating, as it must do, the seat of vitality, the living energy itself, together with the signification of *word*, or *medium of communication*, expresses a remarkable coincidence of properties appropriated by

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the Saviour to himself, or ascribed to him by his inspired servants—"I am the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*:" "In the beginning was the *word*."

This word is used by the same school to indicate doctrine—a system of metaphysical principles and moral precepts—and in this sense generally stands connected with *le*, which means reason, in its recondite, abstract, divisible state; while *taou* denotes principles embodied in actions and conduct, which are the result of a deliberate operation of the understanding; hence its appropriateness to express the sense of the term doctrine or truth.

Confucius represents heaven as an object of supreme veneration, which, according to popular opinion, bestows blessings, and inflicts judgments, guides the steps of men, and frustrates or promotes human designs, agreeably to its sovereign counsels. But philosophical definitions by later writers invest it with no other attribute than uncreated materialism, destitute of the intelligence necessary to a sagacious mind or controlling agency, and diffused throughout the universe as an indivisible principle, otherwise called *tae-keih*, "the highest point;" or *woo-keih*, "no point"—the original limit beyond which the mind cannot reach. It is also explained by *le*, alluded to above, as an innate principle of primary matter, which when organised is designated by *sing*, "nature." I never could learn that attributes of wisdom, power, eternity, or immutability, were applied to heaven; although the sage says he has long prayed to heaven, and describes an offence against that power as taking away the resource of prayer from the offender. What, then, it will be asked, is the notion attached to heaven? I should say, precisely the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

same as that attached to fate by the ancient Greek tragedians and philosophers.

A native commentator on the term, explains it by reason —the innate principle of order inhabiting matter—synonymous with first cause. The sage considered himself as employed by heaven to promulgate its sacred doctrines throughout the universe; and yet he seldom spoke of the divine decrees, a future state, or religious worship. Heaven, when used metaphysically, conveys a very different idea from that of the firmament, with which, however, it is often confounded. Its extension as a canopy over the earth, in conjunction with which it is worshipped, is the probable reason of its alleged ubiquitous influence, its supreme honour, and unequalled dominion. "It is improper," says a disciple of Confucius, "to accuse nature of wanting intelligence, and equally incorrect to identify its mental operations with those of man. Who can imagine that a person is appointed, on the part of heaven, to judge crimes, and determine their punishment? Yet who will have the hardihood to deny the exercise of absolute control?" To an anxious inquirer, whether the azure heavens exercise supreme, intelligent government; or the First Cause—devoid of a designing mind—be merely a principle of order inferred from tracing things up to their origin, such philosophy presents no satisfactory solution. Notwithstanding the indefinite sentiment entertained of heaven, the Chinese insist much on its absolute power in ordaining their present condition, and controlling their future destiny; the inexorable operation of whose decrees are pleaded in apology for guilty indifference to the life and property of a neighbour, which is suffered to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

perish in the flames or in the water without effort to save it. Life and death, riches and honours, depend, it is averred, on the decree of heaven, which, like wise sayings of great men, is an object of profound veneration with virtuous minds. Confucius, on occasion of the death of a favourite pupil, exclaimed, "Heaven has ruined me! Heaven has ruined me!" Mencius, in reply to an inquirer, who asked whether Yaou did not confer the government of the empire on his successor, denied that it was in his power to do so, when the following conference ensued between them, in which the philosopher is respondent. "Who, then, disposed of it?" "Heaven." "In what manner? with reiterated distinct commands?" "No: Heaven revealed its will not in words, but by conduct and circumstances." "What do you mean?" "The emperor had the prerogative to introduce, or recommend, a person to heaven, but had no power to determine its choice: heaven, however, approved Shun, and the people unanimously received him." "How does that appear?" "When he presided over the imperial sacrifices, the gods graciously accepted his offerings in token of heaven's approbation; and when he assumed the direction of public affairs, tranquillity prevailed among the people indicative of their good will: it was not, therefore, the emperor, but heaven and man who had the disposal of the vacant throne." Hence while heaven is appealed to first in a system of universal government directed by this power in conjunction with man, the latter in reality takes precedence, according to the sentiment generally acknowledged —"the voice of the people is the voice of God." Moreover, it is said, "Heaven hears and sees as the people hear and see;" on which passage a commentator remarks,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"This is necessarily the case since heaven is without figure."

To every one acquainted with Chinese sentiments on the First Cause, it is evident that the terms Shang-te, "Supreme Ruler," used in the Shoo-king, and Teën, "Heaven," have the same meaning, so far as either is reducible to any definite conception. This opinion is corroborated by the following passage from the She-king, the most ancient collection of odes extant in the Chinese language; it is quoted in the works of Mencius, a part of the celebrated "Four Books:"—"The descendants of the Shang dynasty numbered more than one hundred thousand persons; Shang-te, 'the Supreme Ruler,' decreed their subjugation by Chow; for heaven's decree is not invariable: that is, is not always in favour of one family."

In this extract, "Supreme Ruler" and "Heaven" are used, as synonymous terms, to point out the all-controlling energy to which the actions of individuals, and the fate of nations, are subjected; which energy seems in many respects equivalent to the Jupiter Optimus Maximus of the ancients, both in the prerogatives it assumes and the attributes with which it is invested. If there be properties attributed to it at all descriptive of the character of the Supreme Being as he is revealed in the Scriptures, they are those of the god of providence; albeit in connection with this idea other sentiments are entertained which nullify the conception of an almighty, ever-living, unchangeable existence. According to the meaning of the words "Supreme Ruler," the prerogatives of this personage are restricted to the single act of ruling the world. But Shang-te is the same as *teën*, "heaven;" and *teën*, "heaven," is synonymous with *le*, "principle;"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

while *le*, "principle," according to Chinese philosophers, is but another name for the abstract essence, *tae-keih*—the *anima mundi* of the Platonists—which originated, pervades, and animates the material universe. Now things that are equal to the same are equal to one another; wherefore, since *Shang-te* is synonymous with heaven, and heaven is explained by *le*, *Shang-te* must also be the same as *le;* whence this epithet, supposed to be descriptive of the true God, and to be derived by tradition from the patriarchs, is in reality no more than a personification of the invisible principle, *le* or *tae-keih*, according to the opinions of modern commentators on the subject. Again: heaven, earth, and man, are denominated *san-tsae*, three powers—of which this one principle innate in matter is the essence; and from the language of native authors, as well as the opinions of foreign Chinese scholars, I am strongly inclined to think that *Shang-te* and *tëen* are but different terms for the same mysterious Supreme, who sways the destinies of mortals, whose name is used to overawe the public mind for political purposes, and who is to be approached but seldom—as on great national occasions — lest the people should contract too great familiarity with such august titles, and cease to reverence them. Confucius admonishes his disciples to treat the gods with respect, and to keep at a distance from them.

It has been common for the emperors of China, in modern as well as ancient times, who are arrived at a peculiar epoch of their history, or have received marks of celestial favour in a lengthened and felicitous reign, to offer solemn sacrifices to the Supreme Ruler, the azure heavens, the earth, and the spirits of departed ancestors, all which deities share equal honours, though precedence

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

is given to Shang-te, under the pretext of evincing their gratitude, and avowing their dependence for the future, but rather to avail themselves of the popular influence acquired by such an appeal to the prejudices and superstitions of their subjects. The coronation of a young prince, and the celebration of a jubilee at the close of an aged emperor's reign, are occurrences befitting munificent sacrifices, and solemn exercises of public and national devotion. Both events happened in the life of Këen-lung, whose conduct furnishes an illustration of the manner in which these festivities are observed. At his own coronation, while burning incense and silently praying to the high heavens, he made a vow, that since his ancestor Kang-he — his immediate predecessor but one — had reigned sixty-one years, so he, if he should be permitted to reign sixty, would then transfer the crown to his heir. Accordingly, at the winter solstice, during the great sacrifice, the emperor says he prayed to the Supreme Ruler; and mentioning the name of his intended heir, desired that if he were not fit for the throne, judgments from heaven might fall upon him, and another selection be made. He announced his intention to his deceased ancestors also, who, he imagines, look down from heaven and observe what is doing on earth. The heaven he prayed to, and the heaven where his ancestors are supposed to dwell, though the same word is used, seem to have proceeded from different ideas in the emperor's mind, the one inferior to the other; but heaven, supreme ruler, and ancestors, are all treated as if possessed of equal powers; and, indeed, his holy mother, then an old woman, is placed as high as Shang-te; for he told her also of his intention, and then, probably to enable the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

deity to decide, reported her answer to him. He was advised by his attendants not to raise his son to the throne during his own lifetime; but his prayers, his vows, his secret intercourse with high heaven, the supreme ruler, and the souls of his ancestors, determined him to carry his purpose into effect.

I have previously adverted to two meanings of the word *teën*—that of "material heavens," and "supreme presiding power,"—both which are connected in this passage with a third—"the supposed residence of departed spirits." The difficulty of attaching precise notions to such terms in native authors arises from their being ambiguously used in a special sense, when the context would seem to indicate the ordinary signification. It appears, however, that the term *Shang-te*, in its application to the invisible power by which the affairs of the universe are controlled, is borrowed from its common use to denote supreme authority and government on earth; and that *teën*, suggested by the overshadowing material heavens, is appropriated to the same invisible Supreme, probably because the works of creation inspire the thoughtful beholder with impressions of an existent, eternal godhead. This sentiment would be especially produced by the celestial portion of the divine workmanship, to the study of which the Chinese, as well as the Arabians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, have been remarkably addicted from the earliest ages. For this reason also it is that astrology—the pretended science of the stars—coupled with the assumed decision of a numerical fate, has enthralled such masses of intellectual being through so many ages. Kung-ming, a celebrated personage in the civil wars of the three kingdoms,—the third century after Christ,—was much devoted

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

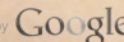
to the study of astrology, by the aid of which he foretold his own death during his last illness. He nevertheless, having lighted lamps within his tent, in a certain number and order corresponding to the appearances of the heavenly bodies, composed a prayer on the occasion, which he addressed to heaven and the stars for the purpose of reversing its decrees and protracting his life. It was as follows: "Born into the world in times of anarchy, I would gladly have remained till old age secluded amidst forests and fountains of water; but called forth by frequent visits from the emperor, I did not presume to decline my utmost exertions in his service; I am apprehensive that my life is now drawing to a close, and have therefore reverently written a short prayer to announce these things to the azure canopy of heaven; and, prostrate, hope that heaven will graciously bow down, look and listen, and bend circumstances, that the number of my days may be increased, and that I may recompense my sovereign, save his people, and render the house of Han perpetual. I dare not offer irreverent prayers, but am impelled by the most acute and sincere feelings." Having finished his prayer he remained prostrate on the earth till morning, and shortly after died. But notwithstanding the ill success of his petition, and that it is the popular belief of the Chinese that death is pre-ordained by a fixed numerical fate, they still arrange lamps corresponding to the stars of heaven, and have recourse to spells and charms in imitation of this celebrated individual. During the commotions in which he lived, there were, according to the records of those periods, nine eclipses of the sun, seven rendings of mountains, eleven earthquakes, four extensive inundations, two famines, in

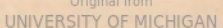
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

which the people devoured each other, and twenty disturbances on the frontier. Celestial phenomena, denominated "signs from heaven," are considered as interpreters of the divine will, which enable the initiated to read the destinies of mortals with infallible certainty. The eclipse of the sun is supposed to indicate want of virtue in the monarch, and the necessity of close self-examination. An eclipse of the moon should suggest inquiry into the nature of public punishments inflicted on criminals, whether they are not lighter than justice demands; for, according to the sentiments of some Chinese emperors and courtiers, heaven will sooner be offended by an infliction below than above the standard of equity; although there is often much parade of the emperor's clemency, both in passing sentence on a criminal and carrying it into execution.* An eclipse of both these heavenly bodies occurred in the first month of the sixtieth year of Këen-lung's reign, which, notwithstanding the emperor's conviction that "eclipses take place in regular order, and may be calculated thousands of years before," he is rather inclined to regard as an extraordinary event. Reasons derived from political considerations, and the appearance of the heavens, are found commingled in the conduct of the imperial government, which savours more of dexterity in accommodating itself to the predilections of the people than of faithfulness even to its own limited convictions of duty towards a higher power.

Heaven and earth are the most common deities invoked

* For example, when a criminal is about to suffer decapitation at Canton, he is made to kneel with his face towards the north, that is, the place of the emperor's residence, and (*kan seay hwang te teih gnan*) thank his imperial clemency for inflicting fatherly chastisement so mercifully on so undutiful a subject.


Digitized by Google


Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

on ordinary occasions by the government and the people. These powers may be considered only as other names for Yin and Yang, the male and female in nature; the male applicable to heaven, and the female to earth. On formal state occasions the emperor officiates as the high priest by offering bullocks in sacrifice—a rite which it is said originated in high antiquity before the invention of fire, when the victim was presented undressed. It is now slain and prepared two days previously, when his majesty sacrifices in person. The emperor and his officers may be regarded as the priests of the court sacrifices which constitute the national religion of China, and are offered to heaven at the winter solstice, to earth at the summer solstice, and then to Shang-te praying for corn, to deceased ancestors, and to local deities, such as gods of the land and grain, spirits of mountains, rivers, winds, and fire; the queen of heaven—a deified young woman, who lived in the province of Fŭh-këen in the ninth century. She was the member of a seafaring family; at an early age she recited prayers addressed to the goddess of mercy, and made a vow of perpetual virginity. It is said she fell into a trance for the purpose of saving her two brothers; but being hastily awoke by her parents, she was prevented from rescuing her elder brother, who was drowned. Towards the close of the century she died, or rather according to the Chinese expression (shing-hwa), "ascended and was translated." She afterwards often appeared to deliver persons from danger; and was honoured in the twelfth or thirteenth century by the imperial family of Sung with the posthumous title—*hoo-kwŏ-pe min tëen how neang neang*—"her ladyship the queen of heaven, the guardian of the country, and preserver of the

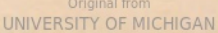
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

people." The deity of the sea, the Neptune of China, from whom rain is supplicated, and to whose honour numerous temples are dedicated on the banks of the great canal; the god of literature to whom the learned present offerings; the *manes* of the dead, among whom Confucius, honoured by sacrifices twice a year, and a warrior of the Han dynasty, the Mars of China, worshipped by the military, are greatly distinguished; the latter more especially by the reigning family. The inventors of law, medicine, and almost every other art or profession that has been of service to the Chinese, are placed among their gods. Such are the divinities of a sect which professes to have found out the First Cause to perfection! But what inconsistency between sentiment and practice! For while one first cause is darkly apprehended, on the principle that every thing which exists is the result of an originating agency, these deluded reasoners ascribe divine honours to a multitude of topical deities, some of whom have been men or women like themselves; others are the most magnificent and striking objects in the material world, and others the great changes and revolutions in nature.

But it may be asked, what other means are in operation by which juster conceptions of the Creator of the universe might be diffused among the Chinese?

Jews, it has been said, inhabit the interior of China. If this be the case, they must have resided there several centuries; and consequently, during that time may be supposed to have communicated some correct information respecting the God of ancient Israel.

Some writers on ecclesiastical history have maintained that the Nestorians entered China about the close of the


Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

seventh century, where their sect flourished—especially during the thirteenth—until its decline and fall in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. But as Dr. Milne justly remarks: "The Nestorians, according to Dr. Mosheim, and other ecclesiastical historians, must have been in China for a period of more than eight hundred years; and it is a singular circumstance, that if they really were there for so great a length of time, Chinese history never mentions them." Since the Chinese mention the Buddhists, the Mahometans, and the Roman Catholics, it is certainly reasonable to expect that the Nestorians, occupying so prominent a position in the country during several centuries, would also attract the attention of its historians and philosophers, more especially as Choo-foo-tsze and other eminent writers lived near the time of their greatest alleged prosperity. Native authorities, however, preserve the most entire silence on the subject; whence it is doubtful whether this sect ever existed in that region of the world.

Mahometanism was introduced into China about the ninth century; the disciples of which, since they are zealous opponents of idolatry, would inculcate the worship of one God. Its followers occupied the mathematical department at court for three hundred years, until the fall of the Ming dynasty—the last Chinese family that sat on the throne—and the usurpation of the Tartars. But little light has been thrown on the general question of the Divine existence by the operations of this sect, who, however, use the term Choo, "Lord," to denote the Supreme Being, whom they declare to be only one—not the first of a series, but separate and distinct—without likeness, manner, or mode, incomparable, unequalled in rank

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

or state of being. In the north of China there are still several cities inhabited by the disciples of Islamism, respecting whom it may be affirmed, that, so far as any beneficial influence has been exercised, they might as well have been left to their own misguided reasonings; the introduction of this system having only involved them in deeper perplexity and error.

The Roman Catholics first communicated correct sentiments on the existence of God to the Chinese empire, which they entered in the sixteenth century, with a zeal and determination that no obstacle could withstand, to plant the standard of the cross within its territories, and subdue its millions to the obedience of the Romish faith. The designation for the Supreme Being which they finally adopted, and which now characterizes their system in China, is "Heaven's Lord."

Since that period Protestant missionaries have translated the whole of the Scriptures into the language of the Chinese, who have now an opportunity of comparing their views of the First Cause with the doctrine of Divine Revelation on this all-important topic.

From the preceding remarks it would appear that the application of the terms Shang-te and Heaven to a superior power has been derived from their use to denote supreme authority on earth. It is well known that the Chinese government affects to be a transcript of the celestial orders; the combined influence of which its functionaries are said to represent, in the discharge of their respective duties. Action and re-action of sentiment is thus produced. On the one hand, superstitious prejudices are invoked to ensure the subordination of the people to their rulers; on the other, respect for the prevailing

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

superstition is upheld by an appeal to the framework of civil society, as affording tolerance to the principle of one presiding deity, aided by the authority of numerous inferior gods. Wherefore the infidelity of the sceptic in religion, according to Chinese notions, is silenced by reference to the existing order of civil government; and the political anarchist is made ashamed of his turbulence by an appeal to the authoritative example of the heavenly bodies, the harmony of whose operations bespeaks the wisdom of a system of political and moral control founded on so illustrious a model. Chinese authorities, it must be confessed, have always been very careful publicly to acknowledge their dependence on a Supreme Power for military successes as well as civil tranquillity: hence Keên-lung, one of the most celebrated emperors of the present dynasty, having subjugated a Tartar tribe, raised a stone tablet at E-le, where he had fixed the seat of the local government, and inscribed on it the following couplet:—

天之所培者人雖傾之不可殛也
天之所覆者人雖栽之不可殖也

The tree which Heaven plants, though man throw it down, cannot be uprooted:
The tree which Heaven casts down, though man re-plant it, will never grow.

This term, heaven, however, is far too complex in its import to express, without confusion, the simple idea of God; for it denotes the material heavens, which, in conformity to the Ptolemaic system, are divided into ten different strata, of which the third stratum is the dwelling-place of the goddess of love; the ninth is the *primum mobile*, which carries the other eight along with it; the tenth is

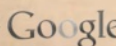
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the dwelling-place of the Great Ruler, and of all the gods and saints who are tranquil and unmoved. Choo-foo-tsze calls it "the hard shell heaven," which comprehends the inferior heavens, and controls the universe. True, heaven is sometimes represented as intelligent, impartial, just, and merciful, to which, however, divine attributes and personal perfections are not ascribed.

It seems that the Chinese early admitted the notion that provinces, districts, cities, towns, villages, streets, shops, families, and sepulchres, require the presidency of a distinct divinity; that hills and vales, streams and fountains, fire and water, the sea and the air, with the more subtile parts of aerial matter, cannot perform their functions in the economy of nature and providence without the inspiring influence of local genii; and that births and deaths, wealth, bodily enjoyment and long life, together with the means of acquiring all desirable blessings, need the superintendence and sanction of individual deities to secure human happiness.

Idolatry, though not generally prevalent till the introduction of Buddhism in the first century of our æra, was first introduced during the Shang dynasty, more than a thousand years prior to that period, by Woo-yih, who, having made idols, employed persons to push them along, and thereby gave offence to real celestial beings, for which he was struck dead by thunder. An image of a man was also made by Te-yih, to represent the gods of heaven. The origin of idolatry, therefore, preceded by several centuries the sect of Fŭh, which is now its principal patron.

Having endeavoured to point out the notions of the Chinese on the first of the three powers in nature con-


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

nected with their metaphysical speculations on the origin of all things, it will devolve on me now to show their physical theories on the formation of the earth, and the use they make of this system in their social habits:—to discuss the properties of the second power in the universe, and its practical influence.

The contrast between heaven and earth is very great; for earth is represented as a scene in which "truth and falsehood, right and wrong, are blended together without distinction; while in heaven every thing is most clearly discriminated." This sentiment is inscribed on the gate of a temple at Canton, the overseer of which pays to the government a sum equal to a thousand pounds sterling; and it is said recovers it again with a profit in the course of two or three years, by selling candles and other things to the worshippers. It is, nevertheless, one of the supreme powers to which homage is due; and libations are poured out in grateful acknowledgment of plenty.

When the original breath or vapour of the universe was first divided, the solid, polluted, and opaque parts became "mother earth," which assumed the power of controlling and arranging all creatures. Imperial Heaven and Queen Earth are regarded by the Emperor of China as his progenitors. Prayers are to be addressed to these powers to invoke their favour.

Chinese writers on the theory of the earth maintain that there are five original elements, whose names and order are, water, fire, wood, metal, earth, of which the last occupies the centre of a circle described by the other four: the first two take precedence of the rest, both on account of superior importance and priority of existence.

Moses, in describing the creation, mentions water as

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the first element, brought into operation by the Divine Being: "And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Water is also the first element in the mundane system of the Chinese. According to their philosophy, when heaven and earth were in a chaotic state, before a separation had taken place between them, there existed only two elements, which may represent the chaos and light of Moses; these are *water*, the sediment of which became earth; and *fire*, whose more subtile parts ascended and became wind, halo, thunder, lightning, suns, stars, and other objects of similar properties: a system slightly resembling the sacred writers, which divides the water into upper and lower, by an intervening firmament, when the waters below are congregated in one place and dry land appears; but the Chinese do not mention by what power the lighter were separated from the grosser elements, nor how the mass, which was originally soft, became hard. Their theory is illustrated by resemblance to the agitations of water which groups of hills present when viewed from a distant eminence, and by the effect of tides in drifting sands. The orbicular movement of the heavens preserves the position of the earth, which it is supposed, were this revolution to cease, would instantly sink into annihilation. The circular motion of heaven and earth in creation is likened to the upper stone in a mill, which revolves without intermission; and the production of creatures, to the motion of the middle stone, from which coarser and finer materials are thrown out. There is, moreover, a popular notion current in China of eight consecutive days in creation, on each of which, after the opening of heaven

M

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and earth, *fowls, dogs, swine, sheep, cows, horses, man,* and *grain,* were successively produced. It is possible this theory owes much to taste; since the three first productions are delicacies prohibited to young persons by Confucius's rules of filial piety, lest there should be insufficient nourishment for the aged. But amid great darkness and confusion, some likeness is traceable to sacred story; inasmuch as animals were made before man, and successive days of creation are distinctly recognized in this system; which, however, extends the period two days beyond that of Moses, and contains no allusion to the inhabitants of the waters. Moreover, the productions of the earth, which God created first, stand last in this arrangement. Hence it appears man was created on the seventh day, which in the first month of the year is considered by the Chinese as man's day, on which and the day following they will not sweep their houses, "to avoid the allusion of sweeping man and his food to destruction."*

No sabbath is observed by the Chinese; nor is it intimated in their divisions of time. Dr. Morrison, noticing the fact, remarks:—"Those from whom the Chinese descended separated before its institution, and hence a sabbath is not observed among the Chinese. This idea is submitted as a probable solution of the difficulty which exists in accounting for the Chinese having no sabbath, if the observance of that day was commanded at the creation of our first parents. For the argument in favour of the opinion that the sabbath was first appointed in the wilderness, at Mount Sinai, see Paley's Moral Philosophy."† With due deference to such an authority as

* See Morrison's Dictionary, Vol. I. Part I. page 579.
† See Morrison's View of China, page 52.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Paley, I profess I cannot, on scriptural grounds, admit the soundness of his argument, and am therefore unprepared to accede to the hypothesis of Dr. Morrison. If the Chinese, as some not improbably suppose, were originally a colony from Egypt, their early separation from the rest of mankind would account for such confused stories as plainly relate to Scripture facts; and obviate difficulties, in admitting the institution of the sabbath to be coeval with creation, which arise from want of traditional testimony, or presumptive proof in present customs and manners among the same people. It cannot, indeed, be surprising, that idolaters, who soon began to multiply after the Flood, should lose, in natural divisions of time, created by alternations of day and night, and lunar and solar revolutions, a conventional period, whose preservation would only remind them of principles and practices human nature has always been prone to forget. If some nominal Christians, educated in observance of the sabbath from infancy, can readily cease to reverence its sacred ordinances, when transplanted to Pagan countries; need the obliteration of this hallowed institution from heathen minds, thousands of years after its first establishment, excite astonishment, or throw suspicion on its venerated antiquity? We must either suppose that God concealed all knowledge of the stupendous work of creation from the antediluvians and patriarchs, or allow that it is possible for their posterity to forget divine ordinances in quest of worldly gratifications. But to whom did Jehovah utter the sentiments recorded by Moses,* except to our first parents on the day after his works were ended? and why did the division of time into weeks obtain which was

* See Genesis ii. 1—3.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

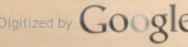
known to Noah,* as appears from his sending the dove out of the ark at successive periods of seven days, when no natural phenomena pointed it out, if it had not been derived from the words of sabbatical institution uttered at the beginning of the world? As well might we argue, that because the Chinese entertain erroneous notions of the creation, the earth was not framed till the Pentateuch was written, as infer the original institution of the sabbath in the wilderness from the fact of its absence from their code of sacred observances, or its omission from their systems of chronology. The fourth commandment, which assigns the rest of God after the creation, as a reason for enacting the law of the sabbath, and enforces its solemn obligation on the Israelites, by motives arising out of their recent deliverance from Egypt, will equally account for the want of a sabbath among the Chinese, whether as re-organizing an ancient institution or establishing one heretofore unknown; because if they, whose progenitors lived nearest to the source of true religion, and preserved its elements and forms for the longest period, now required the republication of a principal ordinance, is it matter of wonder, which bears a doubtful aspect on the doctrine of a sabbath from the beginning, that its observance should be unknown to the ceremonies of a people, from whose minds every correct impression of truth has long been obliterated? Suppose Moses had designed to institute the observance of a sabbath among the Egyptians, would not their estranged condition have justified a wide departure from the manner adopted towards Israel? In one case he must address a people among whom no trace of such ordinance remained, who would therefore need all the

* See Genesis viii. 15.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

formalities of an original enactment; in the other, he would appeal to those who had known the law, but had not accurately kept it, and therefore required it to be re-instated in ancient authority, with such additional sanctions as altered circumstances demanded. China is in the former predicament; no wiser on account of Mosaic institutes, because, as it may be presumed, of her distance from the scene of divine revelations, and sharing in all the disabilities resulting from the gradual but early loss of truth in patriarchal times, which was handed down orally, without any theocratic system like that of Moses, to uphold its rites and ordinances in their pristine integrity.

With regard to the origin and duration of the universe, some Chinese philosophers think that it has been preceded by a similar system; an idea which, considering how many thousand years the present state is supposed to have existed, approximates that of the eternity of matter; that though not in itself indestructible, it is liable to be reduced again to chaos, from which a new organization will hereafter arise. But while nothing short of the highest point to which human wickedness can be carried, will involve the possibility of its destruction, and the annihilation of its occupants, animate and inanimate, still such a state of impiety and moral degradation is possible; so that creation, destruction, and reproduction, in alternate succession for ever, is the conclusion to which this theory leads; a sentiment in some respects not dissimilar to the meaning conveyed in the following proverb—"When at the utmost extremity, a change must be effected:" which signifies, that prosperity not only in the course of events will *probably* precede, but must inevitably


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

generate misfortune; and that calamities, on the other hand, are agents under the power of a similar necessity to produce happiness; whence moral delinquency has power not only to dissolve the present social system, but, moreover, to destroy the material fabric of the universe.

The five elements, so disposed that earth occupies the centre, exhibit a model to which men and things in varied positions are made conformable. The five antediluvian emperors, celebrated in ancient story, seem naturally referrible to this number and its properties; especially since one reigns by wood, another by fire, a third by earth, a fourth by metal, and a fifth by water. Then there are five human relations, and five constant virtues; five ranks of nobility; five points—east, west, south, north, and centre, evidently arranged according to the supposed order of the elements; as are likewise household gods, which occupy the four corners and middle of the house; the five tastes; five colours; five viscera, all which not only conform to the number, but are in some degree under the influence of those original materials.

Such is the general account Chinese philosophers give of our planet, with its correlative properties and influences; from which, no doubt, the title "mother earth" has originated.

The last division of this subject is *man*, whom we are to contemplate in the light which Chinese writers reflect on his origin and ultimate destiny, together with his present relations, domestic, social, and political. Topics, already discussed, have rendered partial tribute to this, in passing; but we design more especially to ascertain the sentiments of Chinese on the human species, and their counsel to man under moral and sacred responsibilities, whom we

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

have seen theoretically dividing sovereign and creative honours with heaven and earth, but practically overruling their decisions. What, then, are the notions entertained of this important personage? how is he treated? and whither, in his earthly migrations, is he constantly tending? Chinese authors allege that he is the product of the earth, which is under the power of a physical necessity to sustain him:—"Earth produced man, and earth must support him." He is the soul of the universe: an expression which denotes the spiritual or intellectual part of creation, the very energy of heaven and earth's creating power; resulting from the intercourse of the male and female principle; congregating in himself the united influence of demons and gods; together with the subtile matter of the five elements.

From the time Yin and Yang united, and the five elements were intermingled in the centre of the universe, moisture and heat operated on each other and produced an intelligent being, who, as he gazed upon the heavens, saw a golden blaze of light dart from a star and fall to the earth. He approached the phenomenon, and perceived an animated creature of the same species as himself. It cried out, "The wings have long embraced you; on the breaking forth of the fructifying principle, I knew that you had entered into the world; and then, plucking plants, made garments to cover the inferior parts of the body." Having bestowed the appellation "Imperial reverence," it informed him of the manner of creation; of the division of the heavens and the earth; of the Yin and Yang; of the separation of darkness from light; and that all things were produced from an egg first formed in the water; that there were four other human beings made,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

at the four points of the compass, each of whom, when the golden-coloured personage disappeared, flew to the spot from a different quarter: the first from the north, "son of the essence of water;" the second from the south, "son of the essence of red earth;" the third from the east, "superintendent of wood;" the fourth, "golden mother," from a paradisiacal mountain in the west. These five persons obtained out of an immense crucible, by chemical process, a male and a female, from whom, through the essential influence of the sun and moon, human beings descended, who gradually filled the earth. His "Imperial reverence" directed the dispersion of the first families, and supplied them with rafts to cross the seas and rivers, to whatever place the wind might drive them. These sentiments are entertained by the sect of Taou, which is called the philosophical sect of China.

From these legends, sufficiently indicative of tradition derived from Scripture, and prevailing among almost all nations, we pass on to sentiments respecting the body and the soul of man. The body is a world in miniature, all whose members act in due subordination to their immediate superiors. It has five officers, arranged according to the five constituent elements of nature, which enter into the physical and moral systems, and control the superstitious theories of the Chinese. The functions of these officials are as follow, and agree, except one, to those of the organs of sense: the eye, which presides over objects of vision, and is called the inspecting and investigating officer; the ear, pre-eminent in sounds, is designated the distinguisher; the nose, to which the faculty of smelling has been assigned, is appointed judge and discriminator; the mouth is the issuing and receiving officer; and the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

eyebrows are the preservers of long life: it is supposed, that a strong, bushy eyebrow indicates longevity, and hence the importance attached to it; but what claim it has to be considered as one of the organs of sense, it is rather difficult to decide.

Opinions expressed by ethical writers differ from those entertained by the religious sect, with regard to the value of the body, and its proper mode of treatment. The Buddhists speak of it most contemptuously: "It is at best," they say, "but a loathsome bag:"—a sentiment probably generated by the successive transmigrations to which, it is thought, one soul may be subjected. Since the body is a mere vehicle of preparation to the spirit for its higher destinies, without any share in the enjoyments secured by a triumphant course of virtue, it is necessarily degraded far below the dignity ascribed to the immaterial and immortal part. It is, however, honoured more highly than animals; which, according to the notions of this sect, are also receptacles of souls sent back from Hades in fulfilment of judicial decrees awarded to them in different halls of judgment, through which they pass to undergo the ordeal instituted for human beings in these invisible regions. But though it stands first in the class, it is associated with beasts, birds, fishes, and insects, as a material habitation for the soul unworthy to be admitted into paradise, in whose honours, even when finally ransomed by a meritorious career on earth, the body, doomed with brutes to annihilation, can never share. On this system it would be difficult to ascertain how many bodies are required for one soul, or in what part of the animal creation these migratory spirits which have re-entered the world are now sojourning: re-union between the same soul

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and body in a future state seems never to be contemplated: indeed, it involves a physical impossibility.

The Confucian system, by reason of its deep veneration for filial piety, is most solicitous to honour the body. To treat it with ignominy, wounds the reputation and feelings of parents, who are the instruments of its existence; but to lavish praises upon and almost adore it, is quite consistent with theories which hesitate to admit, if they do not positively deny, the immortality of the soul. A disciple of Confucius, drawing near to death, uncovered his body, to show by its perfect condition the extent of his filial piety, but indicated no apprehension of the continued existence of his soul in another state. The theories of this sect well accord with human nature. Nourishment of the body, necessary to its wants and grateful to its feelings, is not only a natural but sacred obligation, performed under the pleasing impression that honour is thereby reflected on parents and ancestors, the merit of which will be rewarded with the homage of admiring posterity in life, and by sacred offerings after death.

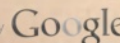
Injunctions to preserve the body are not, therefore, avowedly based on selfish fear of pain occasioned by neglect, but on sacred duties arising out of the filial and paternal relations. Voluptuousness is not professedly encouraged; but all ceremonies, whether religious or civil, social or domestic, whether applied to living beings, dumb idols, or the spirits of dead men, begin and end with feasting.

Inquisitive nations, accustomed to reflect on man's constitution and destiny, naturally speculate on his mode of existence after death, and the enjoyment or sufferings of a future state. Chinese theories with regard to spirits

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

are gloomy and uncertain. They have been generated from notions of the two original principles in nature,* as it appears from the terms Ling and Hwăn, which they employ to designate the soul; of which Ling is defined to be the subtile, ethereal part of the feminine power, and Hwăn the spiritual part of the male energy, which resides in the liver during the continuance of physical life, and constitutes the *shade* or *manes* when separated from the body by death. Another designation, answering to the word *spirit*, is Pih, which denotes the spiritual part of the feminine energy in nature. It is the sentient principle, or animal soul, that resides in the lungs during life, but is dissipated at death. Superior esteem for male above female energy prevails in this theory; since the ethereal part of the masculine power is divine, and of the feminine power only spiritual. But from the phrases "dissipated," "dissolved," "scattered," applied to the soul by philosophical writers, its existence would seem to depend upon the physical conformation of the body, whose animating substance it constitutes, till resolved into its original elements at death. Some authors speak of its residing in the body as sharpness in a knife—a theory which makes its preservation depend on the state of the body. Of the phrase San Hwăn, "three souls," which probably refers to the Ling, the Hwăn, and the Pih, I received the following illustration from a Chinese:—At death, one of these spirits remains in the house as its protector, to which incense is daily offered by the surviving members of the family; another becomes guardian divinity of the sepulchre, to whose honour a small stone tablet is erected with an inscription on it, meaning, "happy spirit,"

* See page 137.


Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"guardian of the tomb," "spirit behind," or some similar phrase; the third passes into the invisible state, to receive honours and offerings rendered by its worshippers on a platform of stone prepared for their accommodation at the head of the grave.* I have no written authority for such interpretation, but the circumstances adduced in support of it most certainly take place, and therefore invest it with an air of probability. It appears from Chinese authors that, until the introduction of Buddhism, but little was said on the migratory state of the soul after death. Some opinions, it is probable, were previously entertained respecting man's existence beyond the grave; because worship was anciently rendered to heaven and earth as the Supreme Deity. It may, however, be affirmed, that when correct traditions of divine revelation were extinguished, by the growing prevalence of human depravity, all higher motives of religious homage simultaneously perished; for if the original depositaries of truth conveyed along with the doctrine of divine existence, that of righteous retribution also, as doubtless they did, it can hardly be denied that just notions on both points would stand or fall together. Since no well-defined concern for

* According to the Roman poets, every man possessed a three-fold soul, which after the dissolution of the body resolved itself into the *manes*, the *anima* or *spiritus*, and the *umbra*; to each of which a different place was assigned. The manes descended into the infernal regions, to inhabit either Tartarus or Elysium. The *anima* ascended to the skies, to mingle with the gods; while the *umbra* hovered around the tomb, as if unwilling to quit its connection with the body, of which it was the *wraith* or shadow. This notion is expressed in the following lines, attributed to Ovid:—

> "Terra tegit *carnem*, tumulum circumvolat *umbra*,
> Orcus habet *manes*, *spiritus* astra petit."

Hence Virgil represents Dido, when about to expire, as threatening to haunt Æneas with her *umbra*, at the same time consoling herself with the expectation that the tidings of his punishment will reach her *manes* in the shades below.—Encyc. Britann., art. Apparitions.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the welfare of the human spirit, no proper estimate of its importance, nor even any impressive sentiments of its existence, are put forth by the founder of moral philosophy, or the restorer of reason, we must look for religious opinions in China principally among the Buddhists, whose tenets are embraced by many in connection with the morals of Confucius, not a few of whose followers ridicule them in health, but are glad of their succour in affliction, when the approach of death excites the apprehensions of that mysterious monitor within, which, where the feeblest light is thrown on futurity, cannot be satisfied without some preparation for the solemn act of entering its unknown regions.

The late Dr. Milne has given the following summary of opinions entertained by this sect on future retribution. "The sufferings of the Tartarus which their terrified imaginations have figured are represented in pictures, as the punishments in Purgatory and Tartarus were exhibited in the Eleusinian and other heathen mysteries; with this difference, however, that these are exposed to public view, those were seen by the initiated only. Lakes of blood, into which women who die in child-bed are plunged; red-hot iron pillars, which the wicked are made to embrace; devouring lions, tigers, snakes, and other animals; mountains stuck all over with knives, on the points of which the condemned are cast down and seen weltering in gore; cutting out the tongue; strangling; sawing asunder between flaming iron posts; the condemned creeping into the skins of those animals in the form of which they are destined to appear again on earth; boiling of the wicked in caldrons; the wheel or apparatus by means of which all the operations of the metempsychosis are performed;

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

horned demons, with swords, spears, hatchets, and hooks; wretched mortals, alternately shivering with indescribable cold, and burnt to coals with devouring fire: these, with numberless other such things, are represented with gross and disgusting minuteness."

These terrible representations of a future state, which awaken feelings of horror in vulgar minds, assume the form of impartial justice, proceeding by the ordinary process of law, where the judge, seated on his bench, hears accusations and administers punishments, according to the demerit of crimes proved by witnesses to have been committed, who are represented as present. In the absence of revelation, scenes of future misery seem much less difficult to imagine than those of happiness. The Paradise of Oriental heathens, suggested by a vain imagination, necessarily consists of sensual and puerile enjoyments, rendered desirable to appetites converted by long indulgence into habits, and fostered by a luxuriant climate destitute of the power to gratify propensities it never fails to create. No one conversant with human nature, with its solicitude to grasp objects not yet attained, and with its desire, from disappointment or satiety, to acquire unpossessed pleasure, will suppose that the most ingenious fancy can devise schemes of bliss competent to supply solid satisfaction. What, then, must be the gloominess and discomfort even of those who deny that they are obnoxious to purgatorial pains, or liable to atone in an animal body for sins committed as rational beings; since by the very constitution of natural taste no hope can be indulged of unsatiating felicity? But how few deluded heathens are placed by the decisions of conscience, beclouded and misguided though it be, on such an eminence

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

in moral attainments, and the practice of self-denying, superstitious rites, as to secure even this small measure of delusive comfort! And what is the alternative but an abandonment to those monstrous terrors, which fiend-like imaginations alone could invent, or minds immersed in brutal ignorance believe? I have seen Chinese females look at pictures of purgatorial torment, described above, with a horror apparently engendered by the impression that they were contemplating a portraiture of their own future doom.

The worship of departed spirits is another species of superstition, which exerts a mighty and irresistible influence over the Chinese. It seems to consist of Confucianism and Buddhism commingled, for disciples of both sects, whether their tenets are distinct or blended in one system, agree in this solemn observance. It operates as an all-powerful spell, by which living, sentient beings are indissolubly bound to invisible shades, once dwellers upon earth. And since the soul of man, it is taken for granted, dwells apart from his body, its immortality, as a natural consequence of separate existence, may be considered as the basis of a practice, which invests his imperishable part with power to exist unencumbered with a mortal form. Perhaps a description of this ceremony will be more intelligible if preceded by a brief statement of Chinese usages at death and interment.

When the parent of a family dies, a messenger is despatched to announce the event to relatives and friends; and a tablet is suspended at the door of wealthy persons, inscribed with the name and age of the deceased. White being used in mourning by the Chinese, pieces of white paper are pasted on each side of the door, to indicate the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

occurrence among individuals of ordinary rank. Children and grand-children of the deceased, clothed in white, with a white bandage round their heads, sit on the ground weeping around the corpse, which is covered by friends with white cloth or silk the size of a coverlet. The eldest son puts two small copper coins into an earthen bowl, which he takes in his hands, and carries, supported by his friends, to the moat that surrounds the city, or to the well at the gate of the village, where he deposits his money and takes some water.* He returns home with the water thus purchased, and the ceremony is performed of washing the face and body of the corpse, which is then put into a coffin in state; and a tablet is erected bearing the name of the deceased; an eulogy on his character as a probationary being, and the designation of the dynasty under which he has lived. These tablets vary in form and inscription in different parts of China. The first inscription on paper is burnt and substituted by wood, before which, morning and evening for seven successive days, incense matches are lighted, and the children of the family prostrate themselves. At the end of three weeks the funeral takes place, attended by friends and relatives, who weep aloud. The tablet is carried in a sedan chair, and placed at the head of the grave, where oblations are rendered and prostrations again performed. After interment, the tablet is brought back, and sacrifices of pigs roasted whole, three or four different kinds of animal food,

* The ceremony 買水 mae shwuy, of buying water can only be performed by the eldest son living, or the eldest son's son, in preference to the second son. Whoever brings the water is entitled to a double share of the property. When neither children nor grand-children are alive, those next of kin buy the water, and inherit the property; so that, in fact, this ceremony determines the heir.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

fruits, and pastry are offered, with accompanying prostrations; also morning and evening oblations, during the space of seven weeks, with the accustomed ceremonial of bowing the head in the dust. Instead of seven days, a period of seven weeks is observed by some rich families, who also defer interment many years. Rooms of paper, supplied with furniture and domestics, are burnt and passed into the invisible state for the use of the deceased. In more barbarous ages, slaves, attendants, and domestic animals, were slaughtered; and the wardrobe, furniture, and other things belonging to the deceased, were consumed by fire to supply the wants of the disembodied spirit. This cruel custom originated in the following manner:—In remote antiquity when rich persons died, imperfect representations of human beings, made of straw and supplied with springs, were entombed with them as their future attendants; but subsequently, about the age of Confucius, images for this purpose were made of wood, and bore a more striking resemblance to living persons than those ancient forms which they superseded; hence the sage, foreseeing that such a practice would eventually issue in the sacrifice of human life, severely reprehended the inventor as an enemy to his species, and declared him to be justly deprived of posterity for his offence—one of the heaviest calamities with which, in Chinese estimation, he could be visited. The horrid usage, introduced not long after, verified the prediction of the sage, whose benevolent apprehensions respecting the waste of human life were realized to a fearful extent. For when Woo-king of the state Tsin died, sixty-six persons were put to death, and interred with him. One hundred and seventy-seven ordinary individuals, together with three persons of superior

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

rank, were devoted by death to the service of *Muh-kung* in another world:—a monody still exists lamenting the fate of these three noblemen. Tsin-che-hwang-te, the first universal monarch of China, who flourished about two hundred years before the Christian æra, built the great wall of China, burnt all her books, buried alive, or left to perish in a pit, four hundred and sixty of her literati, commanded that his household females and domestics should be put to death and interred with him. The custom survived this period for some time; and when persons offered themselves voluntarily to die, from attachment to their masters or friends, such sacrifices were esteemed most noble and disinterested, but moral writers of a later age alike condemn the exactors and the victims of such barbarity. Modern times are satisfied with consecrating by fire silver paper, and representations of earthly enjoyments, accompanied by sacrifices, offerings, and libations.

Paper money, not for commercial purposes but to scatter at funerals, was brought into use during the existence of the states Wei and Tsin, in the third century after Christ. The writer has frequently seen this ceremony performed at Malacca, where Chinese, during their voluntary exile, scrupulously observe the rites of their native country, and tenaciously retain its traditions and customs. Amid the varieties of Pagan worship, no professedly religious act is ever performed with more scrupulous exactness or apparent solemnity by the Chinese than that of worshipping at the tombs of their progenitors. Aware, however, of the aversion of Christians to such a practice as idolatrous, they endeavour to obviate objections, by pleading for it as a mode of external respect

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

similar to interment among Europeans, and to their care of the tombs of deceased relatives. But every discerning observer will soon be convinced of the futility of their comparisons, and the falseness of the conclusions to which their reasonings lead. For if there be apparent sincerity in any act of idolatrous worship, which commends itself in grave, considerate deportment, it is manifested by these devotees when sacrificing to the manes of their ancestors. This mode of worship is attended with stronger demonstrations of feeling than any other, probably because there is deeper apprehension that neglect will occasion temporal afflictions, and engender worldly disappointments and losses. Self-interest prefers a strong claim to the parentage of this apparently benevolent devotion. Superstitious fear of being punished, guilty omission of what conscience enforces as a sacred duty, impression created by public opinion, and sanctity acquired by a custom prevailing from remote antiquity, which is, moreover, in perfect accordance with natural feelings, co-operate to stamp this exercise with characteristics so peculiarly sacred and meritorious, that it insinuates itself into the more important relations of life, and becomes so closely entwined around the fibres of the human heart as to be almost necessary to social existence and enjoyment. So strongly does veneration for this tribute after death prevail, that parents, in order to secure the memorial of the sepulchre for a daughter who has died during her betrothment, give her in marriage after her decease to her intended husband, who receives with nuptial ceremonies at his own house a paper effigy made by her parents, and, after he has burnt it, erects a tablet to her memory; an honour which usage forbids to be rendered to the memory

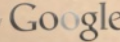
Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

of unmarried persons. The law seeks without effect to abolish this absurd custom.

Judging only by what is seen at such seasons, a stranger would augur favourably of the national disposition, as humane and even charitable. Its professed object is to serve progenitors, and supply their wants; nor is the service confined to those by whom relative obligations have been conferred on earth, for there is a public institution, supported by voluntary subscriptions, which professes to supply the necessities of orphan spirits, who have no consanguineous survivors to care for them. There is a story, on which this practice is founded, of a young man named *Mŭh-leen*, to whom the epithet 'Honorable' is now attached. His mother was a very wicked woman, and after death consigned to punishment in Tartarus, whither her pious and devoted son repaired on the fifteenth of the seventh moon to rescue her from torment. When the gates of "earth's prison"—the Chinese term for hell—were opened, many of the imprisoned spirits escaped from the regions of darkness; and hence the custom of preparing garments of paper, and burning them for the use of the dead, spreading carpets on the floor, reciting numerous prayers, and covering tables with rich viands of varied descriptions, to remove from the abodes of darkness disconsolate spirits who have left no relatives on earth, for the purpose of elevating them to regions of light and purity. Similar ceremonies of scattering prayers and burning clothes are performed on the water on behalf of those spirits whose bodies have been drowned: numerous lanterns are lighted up at nights, and the ceremony is continued every day from the first of the seventh month to the fifteenth. At

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the same season a yearly sacrifice of pigs, goats, and fowls, with extensive offerings of fruit, is provided by the Chinese of Malacca for the use of this description of spirits, to whom silver paper is dedicated by fire; a medium supposed to be necessary to constitute it an available offering. Why fire should be esteemed sacred does not appear. It is sufficiently virtuous to convert things from common to sacred uses, and even by the process of destruction to redeem them from desecration. Although it would be regarded as contemptuous to employ paper inscribed with Chinese symbols for ordinary purposes, or suffer detached pieces no longer serviceable to be trampled upon, yet burning it is not only free from objection, but enjoined as a duty incumbent upon all good Chinamen. A small furnace is erected within the area of the temple at Malacca, to which superfluous portions of written paper are brought to be consumed. Since the characters of the language, according to received theories, originated in heaven, fire is considered the proper medium of restoring them to their pristine dignity, after their allotted service on earth. But the uninitiated will not easily trace the connection between rude outlines of symbols derived from heaven, and their destruction, in a more perfect state by fire, unless this element be the ordained medium of intercourse between heaven and earth. It evidently does not result from the fitness of things. Human reason, left to its own discretion, might with equal propriety have chosen any other element as the ground of its plea with the Supreme Power. Indeed, on any other principle but that of an ulterior tradition from divine revelation, it appears impossible to account for the prominence given to fire as a consecrating element in sacred things. Such conjecture


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

derives some plausibility, I think, from the fact that the symbol for lamb in Chinese is composed of *sheep* and *fire*, that is, a sheep on the fire, as though the peculiar appropriation and destiny of lambs were for sacrificial offerings through fire: an idea not incongruous with the statement of Confucius, that a lamb constituted an ancient sacrifice of very great importance. Other victims, previously deprived of life, are offered in sacrifice; and fire is extensively and frequently employed as a sacred medium between the ultimate cause and human beings. Water, already alluded to as the first element, is sometimes made the receptacle of an extraordinary offering. The writer remembers seeing at Malacca a tortoise offered to the sea by a Chinese whose filial respect, or superstitious feeling, prompted him to render an extra tribute to his deceased progenitors. After a paper house was consumed, and costly delicacies peculiar to the climate and season were offered, with prostrations on the earth by the male members of the family clothed in sackcloth, the tortoise was committed alive to the sea, near which a guard remained sufficiently long to see that no avaricious hand deprived the hungry spirits of their expected feast. A ceremony of this kind is performed in favour of 屈原 a minister of state greatly beloved by the people, who, having been falsely accused, drowned himself, about two thousand years ago: it consists of a quantity of rice bound up in a certain leaf, and tied with silk cords of various colours, which is then boiled and thrown into the water. The same observance continues to this day, and is annually performed on the fifth of the fifth moon, accompanied by the amusement of dragon-boats, and beating of drums, intended to strike awe into the evil spirits that may lurk about the river.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The period of mourning for parents prescribed by Confucius, is three years; the ground of which is the peculiarly helpless state of infancy and its entire dependence on parental care during that time. The sage's system is retributive. It designs that obligations incurred by children towards their parents should be discharged in their own maturity, when their parents are descending into second childhood; and hence the prohibition of silken garments and animal food to those who are under seventy years of age. The care of parents on earth was worthy the legislative ability and benevolence of the sage; but he transgressed the limits of duty, and endangered his reputation for practical wisdom, when he ordained rites of worship to their manes. On the principle of reciprocation, the relations of parent and child become reversed. The father, who is the source of authority in this life, is dependent in the disembodied state on his children who survive him—a system which renders this world the source of supplies essential to immortal existence. The devotees at the tomb are commanded to sacrifice to their ancestors as present, to cherish the remembrance of their virtues, and closely imitate their example. Mourning is not to be worn for children who die under seven years of age. Writers on filial ethics enjoin the interment of deceased friends in a substantial coffin by the side of a hill, to insure the preservation of their remains for the longest possible period. Sometimes the ceremony of opening the grave, collecting the bones, washing aad placing them in an urn, and re-interring the sacred deposit, is performed by those who affect unusual filial devotion. Tombstones were introduced about the first century of the Christian æra, and inscriptions, which recorded the virtues of the dead, were entombed with

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

them. In ancient times it was not the usage to offer sacrifices at the tombs. It is not known precisely when the practice commenced, but it was probably about the age of Confucius. About the seventh century of our æra, persons were employed to weep at funerals, and finally hired for that purpose; the custom of observing every seventh day for a period of seven weeks, as a day of mourning and supplication after the death of elder relatives, began about this period. The remarkable fact of worshipping the shades of the dead as gods, and supporting them as creatures by their sacrificial offerings, does not appear to have struck the Chinese themselves as an inconsistency. A large sacrifice is offered yearly on the 6th of April, at the tombs of their ancestors. The term is called Tsing-ming, "pure and illustrious;" probably because by its observance the habitations of the dead are kept in repair, and the worship of departed friends is maintained, both which acts are deemed splendid illustrations of filial devotion. Papers are strewed about the grave with careful negligence, to remind passers by that its proprietor has rendered necessary homage to its unconscious inhabitant. Tents are erected in different parts of the cemetery, and supplied with essentials of life, or luxuries, according to resources and circumstances, to gratify guests who may honour the family vault with a devotional visit. The whole day is spent among the tombs, which are generally on the slope of a hill, and considerably occupied by these votaries of superstition, in interchange of friendly visits at each other's place of sepulture, where, notwithstanding rigid punctuality and seriousness in performing the rites of worship, festive gaiety prevails with as much spirit and enjoyment, after

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the prostrations are over, as in any ordinary convivial meeting. Nourishment, consisting of rice, pork, fowl, wine, and fruit of all kinds, is first offered to the spirit, with the usual act of homage; and having been thus consecrated to spiritual and invisible objects, is consumed by the worshippers, under the impression of comforting departed shades with sustenance, thereby sanctified to their own support, without diminishing its value for physical purposes. Social intercourse and religious fellowship (so called) are blended in one act; for all who partake of the hospitality of such a season are expected to join in its devotions. An exception is made in favour of the missionaries, who, while the writer resided at Malacca, visited the tombs to distribute tracts, and converse with the worshippers. No objection was felt on the part of the Chinese to our participating their refreshment, nor did we ask questions for conscience' sake respecting its supposed idolatrous devotement. It is painful to a Christian mind, deeply impressed with its responsibilities, to mingle in such scenes; since their eternal consequences to the immediate actors cannot be of doubtful import. Nor is the occasion without danger of a two-fold kind—operating first on the missionary, by creating lukewarmness, and moral insensibility, and then by re-action on the heathen, who perceive less of that jealousy for the Lord of Hosts, than it is his duty to exhibit as well as feel when in contact with such abominations; since, from their constant recurrence, and the conviction of personal inability to counteract their influence, it is difficult to maintain a proper sense of their enormous guilt and extreme folly. Human nature, pliant to evil in every form, however uncongenial may be some of its modifications with esta-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

blished habits, would rather glide along with the stream of current opinions, than set itself, with determined energy, to resist and correct them. Christian principle suffers great trial of strength in opposing this depraved tendency, where no cruel or revolting acts outrage the feelings of humanity. Experience is the best monitor as to the time for assailing such superstitions. The opportunity of addressing so many heathen, released from their secular engagements, on the beauty and excellency of Divine truth, as contrasted with the vain and sinful ceremonies they are convened to celebrate, seems too desirable to be omitted without self-dissatisfaction. It may, however, be questioned, whether the mind, under the fascinating influence of such superstitious scenes, and excited by their present agency, be in so favourable a state to receive impressions as when possessed of its ordinary thoughtfulness and tranquillity.

Chinese, from their native urbanity, are certainly more tolerant of opposition, and less addicted to excessive idolatry, in the literal sense of the term, than many others who give heed to the doctrines of devils and seducing spirits; but, perhaps, more real good will arise from calm expostulations in the absence of demon-worship, than when in actual contact with its debasing scenes and practices. This species of will-worship has been a stronghold of idolatry for numerous ages, and constitutes a most formidable barrier to the admission of a rational and purer system of devotion. It involves the mind in the darkest labyrinths of error, and fortifies its prejudices so strongly, that scarcely any human consideration will induce a Chinese to resign his ancestral tablet—its symbol of authority. It is the very last relic of Paganism, which a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

subject of Divine grace will surrender, and where policy, apparent conviction, or temporal advantage, has induced a Pagan to assume a new profession, this one symbol of devotion, as an irresistible charm, has recalled him from his wanderings in the pathway of truth to his ancient superstition, and bound him, as with a fatal spell, under its omnipotent influences. So strongly did it interfere with the prosperity of Romanism by restoring to its own bosom those who had lapsed into that faith, that violence to the ancestral tablet, as proof of sincerity, was subsequently made the test of fitness to her communion. It truly constitutes a mighty mass of superstitious power, fearful not only in magnitude, but in the number of its constituent parts, the closeness of their mutual connection, and the extent of their ramifications in society. It is fixed in the strongest holds of the human spirit, whose feelings, judgment, consciousness, habitudes, all conspire to support it. It pervades every gradation of society, every diversity of age, each sex, all modifications of outward condition. Its prosperity is hailed as a common interest, by husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister, master and servant, friend and neighbour, ruler and subject. Its presence is marked by incense matches, burned morning and evening in the family, whose abode becomes identified with the tomb by the most mournful and sacred associations. The renewal at intervals of sepulchral rites prolongs intercourse between departed and present members of families, brings as well former generations into ideal contact with passing scenes and acts, as living beings with those now sleeping in the dust. The ancient Egyptians affected to retain the inhabitants of the world when dead, amid the daily haunts of men, not

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

so much to familiarise themselves with the termination of life, as to rob death of his triumph, and deprive the grave of its spoils. The long period to which interment is sometimes deferred by rich families in China, seems to involve a resemblance in sentiment to that which dictated the preservation of bodies by embalming in Egypt.

The constant anticipation of death would seem to be present with the Chinese in the practice adopted at Malacca, of always having a coffin placed outside the door to receive the adult inhabitant who may first require it. There is, however, but little if any additional seriousness on the great moral question. I have seen an aged individual seated on a coffin which he would perhaps soon occupy, reading not one of their ethical or religious works, but a popular novel, highly esteemed, indeed, for the ability with which it is written, though its immediate influence on the heart must be to increase its disinclination for the solemn ordeal of the judgment-seat. The appearance to a Christian stranger of so many peculiarly formed receptacles for the dead, consentaneously placed at the doors of human dwellings, is calculated to awaken his sympathies, and create a tender interest on behalf of their owners. The motive for this singular act is ascribed to the requirements of filial piety, which cannot be satisfied without coffins of prescribed thickness, sufficiently seasoned to resist premature decay. So strict are its injunctions, and so punctually are the duties fulfilled, that aged persons anticipate the rites to be performed at their sepulchres with the joy of hope, which accounts for the keener anguish felt by a parent on the death of his first-born son, than for any other child, since he is thereby deprived both of a representative on earth, and of a con-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

tributor to his enjoyment in Paradise. Still so fondly do surviving members of families extend the sympathies cherished for life beyond the grave, that if they had their choice, even death would be preferred to perpetual separation. An occurrence came under my own observation illustrative of this remark. A Chinese, convicted of a cruel murder, had been sentenced to transportation for life. His friends, who sought to procure a mitigation of his punishment, solicited my supposed influence as an Englishman with the Governor on their behalf. I urged the aggravated nature of the offence as a reason why I could not even conscientiously ask such a thing, if I were sure of success; and suggested that it ought to be matter of thankfulness he was not hanged. He immediately replied, that he considered this a much severer punishment than death; for in that case his parents, who were living, might have performed his funeral rites, and the usual offices at the tomb, of which he was now deprived, while they would also be totally cut off from all intercourse with their son after death as well as in life. In a merely legislative aspect, we learn from this fact that banishment for life is regarded as a much severer act of retribution than death itself by the Chinese, as it probably is by all nations who have no fixed apprehension of future punishment. My object in introducing it was to exemplify the power of demon-worship over the heart and conscience of a Chinaman.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SECTION IV.

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHINESE—THEIR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, COMPRISING THE MEANS BY WHICH ITS AUTHORITY IS UPHELD, AND CARRIED INTO EXECUTION.

FILIAL piety is the first of moral obligations inculcated on children; who are taught to reverence their parents, and render them unlimited obedience, to anticipate their wishes, alleviate their burdens in mature age, and afford them necessary support and comfort in their declining years. Confucius says, "Observe the disposition of a son while his parent is living, and have respect to his conduct when he is dead." A son is established in filial piety, who swerves not from principles recommended by his father during three years after his death. With seeming preference for sincere feeling to outward form, propriety, or ceremony, really occupies a prominent position in every act. It is the standard by which an obedient son regulates his deportment towards his parents in life; it dictates appropriate honours at their death and interment, and suggests the choice of sacrifices to be rendered to their manes. But filial duty is violated when a son's propensity to slothfulness, gambling, or drunkenness, deprives his aged parents of support; when wealth is bestowed with selfish preference on his own family to their neglect; when, to their dishonour, he obeys the seductive lusts of the eye and ear; or when their life is endangered by his

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

love of contention and warfare. Confucius, from whom principles of filial piety, and rules for its observance, emanated, though the doctrine did not originate with him, was of a mild, placable disposition, and discouraged in his disciples a turbulent and vindictive spirit. His instructions were communicated in the twofold capacity of legislator and moral philosopher. He urged attention to the elements of things on the maxim, that a man of superior virtue must study first principles with unwearied application; for when these are rooted in the mind, exterior excellence, both ornamental and practical, admits of easy and successful culture. But what is the basis of this boasted perfection of Chinese sages? Virtue and knowledge seem to be inseparably connected, as root and branch, fountain and stream; the presence of one pledges the existence of the other. Perfect wisdom and immaculate purity belong connaturally to philosophers of the highest class. The next grade, though not born with the same splendid moral and physical properties, is yet able to acquire them by study; and a step further in the descending series, considerable eminence, literary and moral, may be attained by indefatigable diligence and intense labour; but the lowest class of persons, including the mass of mankind, are not only born without superior pretensions, but never arrive at perfection, even with long and severe application. Talent of the highest order is, consequently, a kind of aristocracy in China; and, although not hereditary, it is enjoyed by some as the gift of heaven, over which they have no more control than a person born to an estate has had in determining his fortune. This distinction in favour of sages does not, however, include moral excellence; for all are considered

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

as born with docile, virtuous dispositions, and capable by their own efforts of attaining the standard of perfect virtue; sacred and moral influence is diffused by their presence, which operates with beneficent energy on all whom it surrounds. Their example is dignified by the most exalted epithets, as divine, holy, renovating in its character, a living expression of undecaying moral beauty. Prosperity, individual, social, and national, rests on personal virtue, founded in a knowledge of fundamental principles, which of itself is amply sufficient to insure virtuous practice. The summit of excellence, the golden medium, or pathway of universal rectitude in accordance with the pervading laws of nature, is the object sought by wise and holy men.

The highest practical point of moral goodness and beauty, is agreement with nature as regulated by the unalterable ordinations of heaven, and consentaneous with reason, its grand and ultimate aim. Such is the celebrated wisdom of China; resplendent in the cultivation of virtue that diffuses its regenerating influences throughout society, while it reposes on the undisturbed heights of perfect tranquillity. But this object, in order to its being sought, must be thoroughly known: for it cannot be sought aright unless the mind be in a fixed and peaceful state, by which it is prepared for calm, deliberate investigation—the undoubted precursor of desired success. On this system the mind of the perfect man is a transcript of the visible universe. Its profundity may be compared to nature's deepest caverns, its altitude to the sublimity of heaven, and its substratum to the solidity of earth. It has, moreover, its ideal centre, round which its powers and perfections continually revolve with undeviating rec-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

titude: and hence the extravagant language employed to describe the attainments and practice of virtuous men.

Knowledge, the property of every inquiring, diligent mind, is sufficient to purify the heart, rectify the principles, elevate the understanding, control the affections, and govern the conduct. The most esteemed sages of antiquity were distinguished by nothing superior to the spirit of inquisition which they carried into the laws of matter, both in its original and organized state; into the structure of society—in its habits and usages; and into the operations and powers of mind, so far as they understood its constitution. Unfounded theories on the original substance of which the universe was framed, and on its creation and government, mystified by absurd reasoning therefrom, constitute the chief of what is known of the Great First Cause. To complete this ideal fabric, man is invested with attributes appropriate only to God, whom it excludes from the dominion of his own world, and deprives of homage supremely due from creatures to their Creator as Lord of all. The deportment of the sage resembles the order and regularity of the seasons, which, irrespective of counteracting elements, revolve according to fixed laws. His moral influence may be compared to the canopy of heaven, which overshadows all things; his usefulness, to the fructifying power and nourishing properties of earth; and his sublime doctrine, to the confluence of light in the heavenly bodies, which irradiates surrounding objects. Nature's feebler energies are represented by flowing streams; her more impetuous impulses by extraordinary fertility and mighty changes: herein is displayed the majesty of heaven and earth, to which the sage's all-pervading influence bears a striking resemblance. Assum-

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ing that perfect knowledge is the source of all virtue, Confucius applies it practically to the science of domestic and political economy. When a prince desires to exercise mild and benignant government over an empire, he proceeds, first, to the moral culture of his province; but it is under the conviction that, as a necessary prelude to success, his family must be virtuous and well regulated; that no efforts will avail to secure this object unless his person be adorned with virtue; that the source of personal excellence is a right state of heart, which cannot exist but with purity of motive; and that universally correct motives will never prevail except under the influence of profound knowledge. Prince and peasant have, therefore, but one duty to perform—that of restoring the mind to its original standard of purity and intelligence; for the procedure required by a well-regulated family will suffice to sway the destinies of a mighty empire. Confucius admonishes man to deport himself with due propriety, as a parent, a son, a younger and an elder brother, according to his position in society, which is composed of separate communities, united in consanguineous bonds, whose obligations involve principles and practice necessary for the safety, and sufficient for the happiness, of an entire kingdom.

Filial and fraternal affection constitute the foundation of external duties; and where the manners of a people are based upon virtue, rebellion and anarchy never arise. Dutiful submission to parents secures willing obedience to princes; and subordination of each person to his senior in the family is a pledge of respect to superior members of the body politic. Tenderness in a father towards his children, is a fine exemplification of the kind feeling with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

which a ruler should regard his subjects, whose destinies are entrusted to his sole arbitration, so long as he governs with wisdom and discretion, and administers instruction, support, counsel, and correction, with intelligence and justice as an impartial yet deeply-affected observer. This patriarchal mode of government commends itself to infant communities by its simplicity, and its accordance with those natural principles on which domestic economy is based. For if, on the ground of absolute dependence, a family yield implicit submission to its head, so a kingdom, whose immunities and privileges flow only from the sovereign, is bound to concur in every expression of his will. It is a singular phenomenon in such a system, that it approves the dethronement of a prince whom his subjects unanimously oppose, and registers their sentiments in its archives as a decree from heaven, against which every one who seeks to uphold him is a transgressor. Its theory is despotic power without responsibility, while it admits in practice of most liberal popular influence, uniting the closest despotism with the freest democracy; on the maxim, perhaps, that extremes carried beyond a certain point contain elements of mutual approximation. It is not, however, inflexible principle, but expediency, which characterizes this theory: because success—the infallible token of heaven's approbation—determines not merely the power of the party whom it favours, but the justice of their cause. Theory and practice, not on this subject alone, but on every other where desertion of avowed principles has the prospect of substantial reward, stand diametrically opposed to each other. An exposition of motives and aims in certain acts is freely tendered; nor, granting to the expositor his own mode of illustration and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

argument, can any complaint be made of unreasonable or unjust proceedings. This dissonance between sentiment and action will remind classical readers of the poet's admission—

"Video proboque meliora et deteriora sequor."

The influence of Confucius's ethical system with contemporary and succeeding governments, arises from the irresponsible power it ascribes to a virtuous prince, and the unbounded veneration of regal authority with which it inspires his subjects. Knowledge of it was originally sought with the ostensible object of improvement in morals and science; but being now the only accessible medium to official distinction and emoluments, its boasted power of moral renovation is merged in purposes of secular ambition. No code of morals, or combination of abstract principles, would, through so many successive ages, amid the revolutions and vicissitudes of society, have imbued with its spirit, and modified by its influence, a despotic form of government, itself the subject of numerous changes, had it not favoured the notion of absolute dominion as exercised by the sovereigns of China. Moreover, since it is universally approved by the people, it cannot be altogether unfriendly to their interests. Perhaps its benign aspect on domestic habits may tend to soften the rigour of its political restrictions; especially since honours and rewards of office are open to general competition, with the avowed object of selecting those only who excel in fine writing and acquaintance with the classic lore of antiquity.

But it will be necessary to notice the practical duties which Confucius enforced on his disciples in their social and political relations, whose system excludes respon-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

sibility to the Supreme Being. Three important bonds, necessary to the subsistence of society, are faithfulness between prince and minister, reverence between father and son, and difference of rank between husband and wife; duties which the subordinates in these relations are bound to observe; the wife cultivating a proper sense of her inferiority, the son yielding profound veneration, and the minister preserving his fidelity inviolate. The number three was probably suggested by the three powers in nature, which is the model of imitation to the sage, the moralist, and the legislator. So also the abstract virtues, which generate whatever is lovely and valuable in human intercourse, are reduced to five; because five original elements were wrought up into the composition of the universe. These virtues are, *benevolence*, *righteousness*, *propriety*, *wisdom*, and *sincerity*. Benevolence is a virtue which heaven exercises towards all creatures; especially towards man in supplying his wants, pitying his infirmities, and relieving his distresses. It is characteristic of the feelings which a virtuous prince cultivates towards his subjects, who, while he seeks their welfare with the skill and affection of a mother, imitates the disinterested tenderness of heaven. The parent and the patriot strive to excel in the same high attainment, the one to cherish his family, the other to promote the well-being of his country. It includes, however, moral excellence, on which the charitable disposition it inculcates is grafted; for whatever generosity exists, if the conduct be disfigured with vices, there can be no genuine benevolence; hence the term is also used by moral philosophers to denote perfect virtue. Selfishness, the most formidable antagonist of this principle, is professedly extirpated by the higher class of

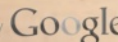
Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

moralists. Confucius, it is said, was destitute of *selfishness, prejudice, bigotry,* and *egotism.* He found the first of these the prevailing evil of his day, and opposed it by all his authority and influence. Corrupt men did not scruple to enter office for the sake of its emoluments, under princes whose government was tyrannical and hurtful to the people, and whose principles were opposed to the renowned doctrines of antiquity. He expelled from his community a disciple who had amassed riches by extortion; and denounced another who coveted gain, as violating the will of heaven. Human nature, as it is modified by love of present benefits, was thoroughly studied, and to some extent understood, by the best moralists and legislators of China. But whatever acuteness might be displayed in detecting the weaknesses and foibles of man, no adequate skill was discovered in providing a remedy against them. The fallacy of the system which is to cure every evil, consists in ascribing original virtue and independent power to human nature. Self must be annihilated, and private views sacrificed to public virtues, a general love to all, founded on perfect virtue, and distinguished in its operations by fidelity and integrity, must be created by a being whose heart is prone to self-love, and utterly averse from the restraints imposed by a higher power. Where such absurdities and follies constitute the highest wisdom of which enlightened Pagans can boast, the necessity of Divine Revelation as a source of infallible guidance, alike applicable to the most opposite modifications of human depravity, and the accompanying influences of the Holy Spirit to render it available, is seen in the strongest light.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Justice, or righteousness, is the next virtue in order on the moral code. It is not always easy to ascertain the meaning of this and kindred terms from native writers, who use them with much latitude of signification. Justice represents what is right between man and man, flowing from disinterested principles, and appropriate to some civil or social relation, not what is merely correct, but what is generous and noble in sentiment. It is an external operation, opposed to benevolence, which is an internal virtue. But it contains no notion similar to the idea of that pure, perfect, independent property ascribed by the Scriptures to Jehovah, as constituting the basis and essence of his proceedings towards man. The sages of China have no idea of applying their conceptions of natural justice, such as they are, to the relationship man bears to God; nor do they recognize the obligations of human creatures to his moral government. That union of justice and implicit obedience which marks the intercourse between an immaculate ruler and his subjects, is excluded from their ethical systems, which, however, seem on some occasions darkly to intimate the ways of Providence and the avenging footsteps of the Deity. Justice is a term much applied to public-spirited individuals, who undertake office on the approved principles of the sages, and maintain high moral feeling in the discharge of their duties. Propriety and rectitude are its constituent principles. It is opposed at every point to sordid purposes of gain, and inspires its votaries with a resolution to do right, fearless of consequences.

According to the records of Chinese history, many such men have stood forward, as the champions of liberty, ready to sacrifice life in its defence. During the reign of


Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

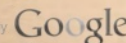
the present emperor, two ministers exhibited, in a memorial complaining of abuses, an independent and determined spirit seldom equalled, at the close of which they informed his majesty, that should he subject them to the axe or boiling caldron, they were not afraid. The emperor, however, declared that they were great and faithful ministers, imbued with the spirit of celebrated ancient statesmen, whose freedom of speech should not injure their reputation: this, however, is a rare case. From the use of this word to express charitable purposes, it may be inferred that benevolence is considered as an act of justice to the destitute. Orphans or others adopted into a family are called children of justice: a charity school is a just school, similar to the Rabbinical use of the Hebrew word *tsedaka*. Any public institution, or object in which the community have a common property, is designated by this term. It is also used to denote fidelity in animals. Uncorrupted faithfulness, which springs from perfect benevolence, is essential to the character of a just man, whether in a public or private station. Such is the theory of Chinese moralists on this point.

Propriety of deportment in civil stations, and accustomed *rites* in religious worship, are of the utmost moment, as the external form in which the virtues of the mind must be enshrined. If we may borrow the assistance of etymology,—and it is by knowledge of language that our acquaintance with popular customs and manners is improved,—" the first idea of the term *le*, ' ceremony or propriety,' is that of footstep, the footsteps or traces to be observed in worshipping the gods: it is composed of *she*,—as already mentioned,—' supernatural manifestation,' and *le*, ' a vessel used in certain rites.' " Whence

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

the notion of intercourse with superior beings in rites of sacrifice, seems to have had an early existence. Many of those gods were deified men who had rendered important services on earth. Others were deceased ancestors, whose supposed presence rendered due decorum in the forms of worship essential to its acceptableness. Propriety, therefore, demands special attention in the interment of the dead. For since parents during life are protected by the laws of filial piety from the morose demeanour or inconsiderate levity of their children, so, when they are buried, the rites of sepulture require to be performed in a devout spirit, and with corresponding gravity of deportment. Funeral honours would be deemed incomplete, even though the prescribed regulations were observed to the letter, if the countenance of the chief mourner assumed an improper aspect.

Of so much moment is outward appearance, that correct feeling, how unequivocally soever it might be manifested, would be insufficient to atone for the want of due order, or for any transgression of its forms. Hence Confucius says, in funeral ceremonies the most difficult part of the duty consists in the countenance. The same love of ceremony pervades the constitution of society. It is seen in the family, where it regulates domestic duties, by assigning to each member his proper station, and exacting from him punctilious attention to etiquette. It dictates suitable modes of communication between host and guest, controls personal behaviour, draws the line of demarcation between individuals of different rank, and ordains proper forms of intercourse in society. To the assumed importance of propriety may be attributed the general politeness for which the Chinese are distinguished. It is with them


Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN