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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VIII.

THE FUTURE OF CHINA.

BY G. FREDERICK WRIGHT.

THE political history of China is one of frequent changes. With striking regularity one dynasty has been supplanted by another every two or three hundred years for two millenniums and a half. But the people have retained their ethnological characteristics with little change. From the earliest times there has been scarcely any intermixture with other races. Their industrial, social, and religious conditions have likewise suffered little change since the days of Laotze and Confucius. Indeed, the immobility of China has been proverbial. So impervious has the nation been to outside influences, that the close of the nineteenth century found everything in the interior essentially as it was three hundred years before the Christian Era.

But at the beginning of the twentieth century new conditions are rapidly arising which will test the capacity of her people and the strength of her institutions as nothing in the past has ever done. The impending industrial changes are such as, in their results, to baffle the most vivid imagination. The 400,000,000 of China are now adjusted to an industrial system in which manual labor is supreme. Machinery is almost entirely unknown. Even the plow is of the rudest kind, consisting of the forked prong of a tree, sheathed at the end with a thin piece of iron, and this is frequently drawn by human muscle. The lumber is all sawed from the logs by hand. The small amount of coal which is taken from the inexhaustible mines is brought up on the backs of naked men, and dis-

tributed, often to a distance of sixty miles and more, by pack animals. The supply for Peking is largely brought in from a distance of thirty miles on the backs of camels, to which it had been transferred from mules which had brought it from the mines still farther inland. The effete condition of the Empire is well exhibited in the condition of this part of the road to the mines. It was once well paved with large blocks of stone, but these have now become so worn and out of place that pack horses cannot go over it. Only the nimble feet of the mule can traverse it with safety.

Practically, the population of China reached its maximum many centuries ago. Its natural increase has long been checked only by pestilence, famine, and infanticide. The same causes are still effectively at work. Every once in a few years, at the present time, an overflow of the great rivers or a brief drought so curtails agricultural production that many millions die from lack of food and its consequent diseases. Smallpox is almost universally prevalent, causing an immense death-rate among children. Unsanitary conditions are constantly at work prematurely to destroy their victims in every city, village, and hamlet. Without witnessing it, one cannot imagine the filth of a Chinese city or village. The principal streets are open sewers without adequate outlets, rendering them little less than cesspools, yet the water for household purposes is all drawn from wells in the immediate vicinity. Finally, infanticide, especially of girls, is still extensively practiced. Indeed, it is still one of the offenses which church discipline has to take cognizance of among the Christian converts. At Shiwanze the Roman Catholics have four hundred girls in their schools, all of whom had been abandoned by their heathen parents in the surrounding country. In some districts such a relative scarcity of girls has been produced by infanticide that families containing a number

of boys often migrate to another province where, on account of the larger supply, wives can be secured for them at less cost.

With the present social customs the destructive operation of these calamities and crimes must continue to go on. Marriage at the age of fifteen or sixteen is almost universal. Indeed, early marriage is a part of the religion of the Chinese. Betrothals are secured by the parents in childhood, and at the earliest practical period the marriage is consummated, and the young bride brought to the husband's home, henceforth to be under the control of her mother-in-law. After this she is scarcely ever out of her sight. The conjugal fidelity of the young bride is thus secured by the perpetual presence of a *chaperon* whose vigilance is never relaxed. The rigorous social law which compels the son to support not only his wife, but the other members of his family, often drives him away from home for long periods of time, in order to obtain employment. It may always be assumed that a Chinaman in foreign countries, or in another province or city than his own, has a wife at home. But, owing to the legalization of polygamy, this does not diminish the birth-rate.

From this brief statement of the causes in operation it is plain that the chronic calamities of the Chinese cannot be averted by any superficial adoption of Western civilization. It must be adopted with all its ruling motives, of which Christianity is the chief, or it will prove a two-edged sword to plunge the people into still deeper calamities. While the birth-rate remains the same, the sanitary and legal measures which shall preserve the children from early destruction, and lengthen the average of life, will but prepare a greater number of victims for famine and pestilence in the near future. With the present birth-rate, the population of China would, with proper sanitary regulations, easily double in twenty-five years. But by no possibility

can the food supply be made long to keep pace with this possible increase of hungry mouths to devour it; for, the agricultural resources of China are already developed nearly to their utmost. There is scarcely an acre of land in the Empire capable of cultivation that is not now cultivated with great care. There are no weeds in China. The whole land is carefully tilled. The grain of every kind is planted in rows, so that it can be hoed and the weeds pulled up by hand. Irrigation is also practiced to nearly its utmost extent. Even the water of deep wells is exhausted to irrigate the thirsty soil. The production of the fields might, perhaps, be somewhat increased by deeper plowing, and by the application of artificial fertilizers. Greater security from overflow might be provided against the floods of the Yellow River. But all this would go only a little way in meeting the wants of a rapidly increasing population, while the utmost limits of its relief would be reached in less than a generation.

A more hopeful source of relief seems to exist in the vast undeveloped mineral resources of the Empire. The amount of coal in China is immense. Almost half the area of China proper is covered with productive coal measures, from which the world might draw its fuel for many centuries to come. The supply of iron ore is less determinate but is doubtless large. But the development of these and other mineral resources will support the increase of population only by drawing on the agricultural products of the outside world, and, so, merely transfer the problem to other regions. If the dreams of modern sanitary science were realized, and the present social conditions continued to exist, China would overpopulate the whole world before the twentieth century should close.

Clearly, the Chinese are destined to be the dominant race in the East, if not in the world. For this they are prepared by position, natural qualifications, and many ac-

quired characteristics. The position of China in Asia, its broad outlook upon the Pacific Ocean, its remarkable combination of tropical and temperate climates, its vast agricultural and mineral resources, and its facilities both for internal and foreign commerce are unequalled by those of any other country. This position partly accounts for the immense population which has so long occupied its territory. So great is this population that it can readily absorb all invaders and make them like themselves. This is shown in the experience of the present dynasty. The Manchus conquered China three hundred years ago. But they have in turn been conquered by the Chinese. The only customs which the Manchus have imposed upon the Chinese is that of the men's wearing the hair in a cue. Chinese women still persist in doing up their hair differently from the women of the conquering people, and in binding their feet, though the Manchu women set an example in leaving their feet unbound. Chinese literature, Chinese education, and Chinese people are now fast transforming Manchuria into an integral province of the Empire.

Many of the natural qualities of the Chinese fit them for preëminence in the struggle for national existence. Physically, they are a hardy race, capable of any amount of severe toil. This is more apparent in the interior than in the seaport towns. In a recent journey of one thousand miles by slow conveyances through the country I have been specially struck by the physical vigor of the country people throughout Northern China. Evidently the weak ones have not survived the severe ordeal to which they have been subjected in the struggle for life; so that, by a process of natural selection, a remarkably hardy race has been secured. The Chinese can live and thrive on simpler and less expensive food, and can survive a severe winter with less fuel and less costly clothing, than any other people. A Chinese laborer can thrive on food that costs

(on a gold basis) but a cent and a half a day. For fuel he is content with the dung of animals, and stubble gathered from the fields after harvest.

The Chinese are remarkably free from the liquor habit. It is the rarest thing in the world to see a drunken Chinaman. Their greatest peril arises from their fondness for opium. But, in this, their poverty is, not their destruction, but their salvation. The mass of the people are too poor to procure opium. The evils of the opium habit are almost exclusively confined to the wealthy and well-to-do classes. And among them it is, to a great extent, its own cure. The evils are so apparent that there is sure to rise a wholesome fear of the drug, such as exists against other destructive poisons. It is not uncommon to see a village which has been ruined by opium, recuperating in the second generation through the efforts of the children to avoid the evils of their parents. Well-to-do people who have become conscious of their slavery to opium are frequent applicants to the missionary physicians for the means of restoration to their primitive freedom.

Among the acquired characteristics contributing to the success of the Chinese, their patience and industry already referred to must be reckoned prominent. But more especially it is in place to mention some of the moral characteristics secured by Confucianism. As a general thing the Chinese system of education is a complete failure. Almost its only redeeming feature is that it compels every child to learn by heart the system of morals laid down by Confucius. With this system little fault can be found. It keeps before the minds of all a higher standard than any one reaches. By it, female virtue has been largely secured, as well as the general fidelity of all to the interests of family life. The medical missionaries with whom I have conversed, are emphatic in asserting that a high degree of virtue is maintained among Chinese women; while all say

that a Chinaman rarely forgets, when absent, to send remittances home for the support of his family. Lady missionaries assure me that, from long acquaintance with Chinese families, they have no question that the Chinese are far better without Christianity than the Anglo-Saxons would be without it.

But Confucianism is not a religion. God is not in all its thoughts. There is no inspiration in it to a noble life. It points the way to a noble life, but does not furnish any religious impulse to attain it. The religions of the Chinese are Taoism and Buddhism. In their affliction they go to the priests of these religions for comfort. It is, however, a sorry comfort which they obtain. Taoism is little else than a series of magical arts and incantations. The present anti-foreign frenzy of the "Boxers" is largely a product of Taoist incantations, by which the devotees are persuaded that they can be made invulnerable. This is no new thing. At one of the missionary stations I met two excellent native pastors who as young men were drawn into a similar but less extensive movement a few years ago. With many others, they sincerely cherished the delusion, until it was broken by the execution of several of their leaders on charge of treasonable designs against the government.

The blindest and most prejudiced cannot fail to see that what the Chinese need more than anything else is the higher ideals of worship furnished by the Christian religion. If family life is to have something better than its present low sensual basis, and is to serve a higher religious purpose than that of providing a progeny to keep alive the memory of the parent, the Chinese must be provided with something better to think about than is found in their present religious systems. The worship of idols and of demons cannot elevate the life of a people. Because it is trite, we are not at liberty to forget the truth, that worshipers are sure to become like the objects of their worship.

The objects of heathen worship are hideous. Christianity alone furnishes those ennobling views of the dignity of human nature, and of the justice and compassion of an omnipresent God, which can enable the soul to live above the world while living in it. To make their family life the handmaid of pure affection, and the instrument of securing proper respect for all its members, and foresight for the welfare of all who are to follow, the Chinese must have Christ, rather than Confucius or Buddha, for their idol.

Christianity is making more rapid progress in China than is ordinarily supposed. Not counting the wives, there are 2,818 names in the Directory of Protestant Missionaries in China for 1899. The work accomplished by these is already conspicuously evident throughout the Empire. The Bible and other Christian literature is widely circulated. Schools are established in every province, where thousands of Chinese youth of both sexes are under training for Christian work. Churches with native pastors dot the land. In many places these are making such encroachments upon the heathen as seriously to diminish the revenues of their temples, and arouse alarm among the priests dependent upon them. The Roman Catholics have never lost their hold in China. At the beginning of the nineteenth century they numbered about 150,000. Now they number 850,000. The progress of Christianity has had much to do in arousing the anti-foreign feeling exhibited in the present crisis in the Empire. Now, as of old in the Roman Empire, Christianity is persecuted because of its success. The Christians in China are sure to be tried in the fire. But the blood of the martyrs will be the seed of the church. China will now become Christian in fewer decades than it required centuries to convert the Roman Empire.

At present there is no patriotism in China. Nobody is willing to be taxed for the benefit of the nation. Except

under compulsion of foreign powers no lighthouses are maintained. All internal improvements are neglected. There are no good public roads and bridges. I have seen nine mules trying in vain to pull a two-wheeled cart in dry weather, across a small stream with a broken-down bridge a few rods away to which the approaches even were not kept in repair. I have driven for hundreds of miles through a thickly populated country along roads leading through the cultivated fields so narrow that the mules could feed from the growing grain as they went along. These roads were often well-nigh impassable; yet, rather than expend labor to make them passable, the people spent an equal amount of strength in digging holes beside the track to prevent encroachment upon their fields. This is but one of many illustrations of how the short-sighted selfishness of the people outwits itself.

Owing to this lack of patriotism and to the thoroughgoing corruption of all officials, it is possible that China must be temporarily dismembered, and brought under political control of the Western Powers which have already established their several central spheres of influence. But, even so, in the end, when the leaven of Christianity has wrought its accustomed work in elevating the masses of the people, and in inspiring them with devotion to the general good, China is sure to reassert her unity. The Chinese patriot should above all others welcome Christianity.

With the low motives which have animated much of the policy of the Western Powers with reference to China, the Christian believer will have little sympathy, and need have little concern. This policy will, in the end, defeat itself. The commerce of China will, in the long run, be best promoted by the elevation of the Chinese people, not by their subjection. Besides, the permanent subjection of such an energetic, homogeneous people is impossible. Her

resources are boundless. Her position is unrivaled. Her people are virile. Under the enlightening and quickening influences of Christianity, she is destined speedily to become the leading nation of the world. In the beneficence of friendly intercourse all nations will reap advantages from her development, and the world rejoice in the fruits of her Christian faith.