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1904.

## ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.\*

REV. F. A. WALKER, D.D., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The following elections were announced :—

ASSOCIATES :—Darrell Edmund Figgis, Esq., Rev. Frederick Storrs Turner, B.A., Walter Cornell Fison, Esq.

The CHAIRMAN.—I have now the pleasure of calling on the Rev. Arthur Elwin to read to us his paper.

Rev. ARTHUR ELWIN.—I have two remarks that I should like to make before I begin to read the paper. First with regard to the name “James Long.” I have been asked, what is the origin of the term “Long Lectures” ? It originated in this way. James Long was a member of the Church Missionary Society who died about 1886, and he was convinced that the reason why people did not take much interest in the religions of the East was that they did not know anything about them, and so he left £2000 to Trustees, the income of which was to be applied to lectures on the East ; and this year, for the first time, it is to be about China, and I have been asked to give the lecture. I have divided the subjects into four, Confucianism, Taouism, Buddhism and Ancestral worship, and to-night we will consider the last of these.

The following paper was then read by the Author :—

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\* Monday, January 11th, 1904.

*ANCESTRAL WORSHIP.* By the Rev. ARTHUR ELWIN,  
 "Long" Lecturer on the Religions of China.

CONTENTS.

Introduction—Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, united in Ancestral Worship—The chief religion of the Chinese—Universality—Antiquity—Historical Notices—Confirmed by Confucius—Ancestral Worship defined—Its great importance—The dependence of the dead on the living—Food, money, and clothes regularly despatched into the spirit world—Consequences of neglect—The Ancestral Tablet—The resemblance of the spirit world to this both in government and every-day life—The effect of this on the social life of the people—Neglected and destitute spirits cared for by charitable societies—Death, insanity, plague, pestilence, and famine caused by destitute spirits—Foreign Devils—Suicide—The value of the head—Ancestral Worship idolatrous—Its great cost—The cause of polygamy, infanticide, and a hindrance to all progress—A striking contrast. Objects used by the Chinese in Ancestral Worship will be shown to illustrate the lecture.

OUR subject to-day is Ancestral Worship, which has been well called *the* religion of the Chinese, for in the worship of ancestors the whole nation agrees, and Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are united. In introducing this subject I think I cannot do better than give an extract from a book, written by one who has spent many years in China, and who is intimately acquainted with the life of the people. Speaking of the Confucianist, we read: "Intellectually far above them" (that is, the uneducated people), "there is yet one spot of common ground. They, in their multiplied idolatries, he, in his cold agnosticism, have one faith in common, one universal family worship, upon which the heart of the nation rests. From the Emperor in his palace to the poorest countryman in his mud cottage, Confucianist, Taoist, and Buddhist alike, all rear the shrine for the ancestral tablets, and worship at the graves of the departed. Hoary with the veneration of four thousand years, this system has come down to them supported by the authority of the sages, and the example of the throne. Ancestral worship has its deep roots in the life of the nation, resting upon that which is most tender, most honoured, most abiding. Fear also lends its aid to perpetuate what affection and reverence demand, for certain calamity, it is believed, would follow the son so unfilial as to neglect the customary rites.

“In every household a shrine, a tablet, an oratory, or a domestic temple, according to the position of the family, contains the simple legend of the two ancestral names, written on a slip of paper or carved upon a board. Incense is burned before it daily, or at the new and full moons. Parents and children meet and bow before the tablet, and contract no associations with temples, or idols, monasteries or priests. There is nothing revolting or cruel connected with it; everything is orderly, kind, and simple, calculated to strengthen family relationships. Thus appealing to the noblest sentiments, strengthened by love, and reinforced by fear, this most subtle of all idolatries twines itself around the deepest heart of the people. The highly educated Confucianist teaches his son to place the offerings and perform the rites, just as much as the most ignorant of the common people. He believes, as they do, that one of the three souls of the departed inhabits the tablet in the ancestral shrine, while another remains in the grave, and the third goes forth into the unknown. He is familiar with the ancient ode, popular in China ever since the days of Samuel, in which the approval of the departed ancestors is expressed:—

What said the message from your sires?  
 “Vessels and gifts are clean;  
 And all your friends assisting you,  
 Behaved with reverent mien.

“Most reverently you did your part,  
 And reverent, by your side  
 Your son appeared. On you henceforth  
 Shall ceaseless blessings bide.

“What shall the ceaseless blessings be?  
 That in your palace high,  
 For myriad years you dwell in peace,  
 Rich in posterity.”

Before trying to answer the question: What is ancestral worship? let us consider its antiquity and universality.

Almost all heathen nations in one form or another worship or care for their ancestors. In Egypt we find that from the earliest times care for the dead was strictly enjoined, indeed did time permit we might visit Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and in each continent we should find traces of this most ancient of all religions. I say, “religions,” because we should find that in almost every country and in every age the care of the spirits of the dead has gradually degenerated into worship, and those blessings have been earnestly sought from

them, which can only be bestowed by God ; very much as the reverence given to the saints by the early church has degenerated in our day in certain quarters into actual worship.

But to-day we must confine our attention to China, and first we must notice, that, of all the religions we find in China, Ancestral Worship is by far the oldest. In the Book of History we read that the Emperor Shun, about the year B.C. 2254, that is before the time of Abraham, "was crowned in the temple of his accomplished ancestor;" and after a long and fatiguing turn of inspection, "he went to the Temple of his Cultivated Ancestor and offered one bullock." The title given to this Emperor's Minister of State was the Arranger of the Ancestral Temple.

In the Book of History we are also told that King Woo, who founded the Chow Dynasty, which lasted nine hundred years, from B.C. 1122 to B.C. 235, when going forth to fight, used these words:—"He, the enemy, abides sitting at ease, not serving God or the Spirits of heaven or earth, and neglecting also the temple of his ancestors, and not sacrificing in it." He adds: "I, a little child, have received charge from my deceased father, Wan. I have sacrificed to God, I have performed due service to the great earth." He returned triumphant, and, we are told, he sacrificed in the Ancestral Temple, and three days after he presented a burnt offering to heaven. The Emperor Woo was contemporary with King Saul.

There is also a most interesting account of the dangerous illness of King Woo, and how his younger brother was willing to die for him. We read the Duke Chow (that is, the younger brother), when he heard of the serious illness of the king, immediately erected three altars to the spirits of his deceased father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, and prayed to them as follows:—"Your chief descendant is suffering from a severe and dangerous illness. If you three Kings have in heaven the charge of watching over him, let me be his substitute." This prayer was deposited among the State papers. Five years after this King Woo died, and was succeeded by a youthful heir. Duke Chow was accused of treachery and went into exile, but when this prayer was found among the State papers left by King Woo, Duke Chow was at once recalled, and his former honours restored to him. Both Dr. Legge and an old Chinese commentator on the classics, think that Duke Chow offered this prayer to the three kings as mediators or intercessors.

Confucius distinctly taught the duty of Ancestral Worship, and enjoined it upon his followers. We have only time for

a few extracts from the Confucian Books. "Do the dead," asked one, "have knowledge of our services, or are they without knowledge?" Surely this was a most important question. The Master answered: "If I were to say that the dead have such knowledge, I am afraid that all dutiful sons and grandsons would injure their substance in paying the last offices to the departed. If I were to say that they have not, I am afraid that unfilial sons would leave their parents unburied. There is no urgency on the point; one day you will know for yourself." One of the most celebrated of the disciples of Confucius speaks thus: "When parents are alive, they should be served according to propriety; when they are dead, they should be buried according to propriety; and they should be sacrificed to according to propriety; this may be called filial piety." The same disciple also said: "Let there be careful attention to perform the funeral rites of parents, and let them be followed, when long gone, with the ceremonies of sacrifice; then the virtue of the people will resume its proper excellence."

Confucius sometimes seemed rather doubtful about the spirits. On one occasion in answer to a question he said: "While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?" Yet we are told it was his practice "to sacrifice to the dead as if they were present, and to the spirits as if they were before him."

Interesting as the historical aspect of Ancestral Worship is, time will not allow us to pursue this part of our subject further. We must now leave Confucius and history, and coming down to our own day inquire, what is Ancestral Worship as practised by the Chinese at the present time?

The practice has been thus defined: "Ancestral Worship includes not only the direct worship of the dead, but also whatever is done, directly or indirectly, for their comfort; also all that is done to avert the calamities which the spirits of the departed are supposed to be able to inflict upon the living, as a punishment for inattention to their necessities."

The belief of the Chinese with regard to the dead and the future world may be briefly stated as follows:—

1. They believe that the spirits of those who have died and passed into the other world require food, money, and clothes, just as they needed them in this.

2. They believe that these necessary things cannot be obtained in the other world, but must be sent by the friends who are left alive in this.

3. They believe that as the dead have become invisible,

everything intended for their use, except food, must be made invisible, by burning.

4. They believe that those in the spirit world can see their friends in this, and that they have it in their power to return to this world, to reward or punish, according to whether their wants have been attended to or not.

5. They believe that nearly all sickness, calamity, and death is caused by these neglected and destitute spirits, returning from the spirit world, taking vengeance on those who should have helped them, but have not done so.

6. They believe that every one has three souls; at death one remains in the coffin; one goes into the ancestral tablet; and one is arrested and imprisoned in the spirit world. Offerings must therefore be made at the grave, before the tablet, and at the temple of the city god under whose jurisdiction the man is supposed to be undergoing trial and punishment.

7. They believe that the spirit world is very much like this, and is governed in the same way.

We will now notice some of the practices and customs of the Chinese with regard to the dead, which will illustrate what has been already said.

When a member of a family becomes seriously ill, the relatives and friends at once conclude that the illness is caused by some destitute spirit, and without delay offerings are made before the ancestral tablets. If the sick one does not get better, they conclude that the sickness must be caused by some spirit not connected with the family, and in this case paper money and other offerings are burned before the door in the street.

While the man is alive, there may be a little doubt as to what is best to be done for him, but as soon as he dies all doubt vanishes, and the path is quite plain. The following things are deemed absolutely necessary to be done in order to settle the spirit comfortably in the spirit world:

1. The first thing to be done is to place a cup of cold water at the door, in order that the spirit may take a last drink. This is one of the many customs which have been handed down from antiquity; the Chinese can give no explanation of it. This custom is the more strange, because the Chinese do not drink cold water, they prefer hot water or tea.

2. The next thing is to clothe the deceased in a good suit of clothes. This is generally done, if possible, before death. The idea is that the spirit, going into the other world, well clothed,



will be better treated there than if appearing in a ragged condition.

3. The next thing is to burn a quantity of paper money. The relatives know that the spirit will be arrested upon arrival in the other world, and at once be taken off to be judged, but if a good present can be given to the policemen, they will go back and say that they could not find the soul. This is what is constantly done in this world, the policemen (or "runners" as they are called) are always ready, "for a consideration," to allow a prisoner to escape, and the relatives conclude that this can be done in the spirit world also. When a man hears of the death of a friend, it is the proper thing to send some of this paper money to the house, that it may be sent after the soul of the departed. Sometimes this money is placed in the coffin, but generally it is burnt. In one case I myself saw the bank notes tied into the button holes of a man about to be placed in his coffin, in order that they might be quite handy when, in the other world, the policemen came to arrest him.

4. The coffin and the grave have to be carefully attended to. If the man be old, the coffin has no doubt been ready for many years. The first money which a young man earns when he goes into business, is generally expended in the purchase of a coffin for his father; this would be considered a most filial act.

5. The preparation of the Ancestral Tablet.

6. The regular dispatch of the clothes, money, and food, and various luxuries for the use of the spirit of the departed. The clothes and money are burned before the Ancestral Tablet. The food is exposed on a table for a time, and then eaten by the friends who placed it there. The spirits are supposed to have taken all the strength and goodness out of it, so that those eating it will tell you it has no taste.

Food, money, and clothes are absolutely necessary, but other things may also be sent: household furniture, sedan chairs, indeed anything that is in use in this world, may be made into paper and dispatched into the next.

7. The formation of charitable societies to care for the spirits that have no relatives or friends to send them the necessary offerings. There were many charitable societies in the great city of Hangehow in Central China which cared for the poor, but the most wonderful society of all was one formed to care for poor spirits. Three times every year thousands of suits of clothes and other necessaries were dispatched into the other world, for the use of these destitute spirits. Usually the streets of a Chinese city, after the sun has set, are quite dark,

and if we go out in the evening we have to take a lantern, but the night when the offerings are made, lanterns are hung all along the street to give light, so that the destitute spirits may not miss their way, when on the road to the place where the offerings are to be made. It may be mentioned that this society is subscribed to by all the chief men of the city. Fear prompts the gifts. Destitute, neglected spirits may do much harm, but if only they can be kept clothed and fed, they will be quiet.

This fear of the evil spirits is a very real thing with the Chinese. Not a few times, when sleeping in a Chinese village, have I been awoke in the middle of the night by a tremendous noise, caused by shouting, beating of gongs, and the letting off of fire crackers, and I have been told in the morning that the noise was caused by the people driving away an evil spirit. Someone had died, or, as they say, "the evil spirit had run away with somebody's soul," the fear being lest if the spirit were not driven out of the village, someone else's soul might be run away with.

Insanity is nearly always ascribed to possession by a destitute spirit. The speaker has in his possession iron fetters, which were worn for many months by a young woman, who was said to be possessed by a destitute spirit. The friends of the young woman heard that the Christian's God could cast out evil spirits, they therefore asked a member of the new religion to come and pray that the spirit might be cast out of their relative. The prayer meeting was held in a little room far away in the hills. The Christian prayed that, as in time of old the Lord had exercised His power by casting out evil spirits by the shore of the sea of Galilee, so He would now once more exercise that power by casting out the evil spirit that possessed the young woman kneeling in the room. When they rose from their knees, the friends at once removed the chain with which the young woman's feet were bound, and she was free. For three years the young woman was connected with our mission in China, and at the end of that time, to our great regret, her husband came and claimed her, and took her far away into the hills, where we could not reach her.

It is well known that all foreigners are called by the Chinese "Foreign Devils." We hardly ever went out in the streets of Hangchow without hearing someone say: "There goes a foreign devil." It is not a nice name to be called, and it will be well to inquire what the name really means. The word translated Devil, is the name given to the destitute spirits,

which return from the other world, and do so much harm. The Christian religion is often called by the Chinese the Foreign Devils' religion, and the people, when they become Christians, are in their opinion no longer Chinese, but Foreign Devils. The evils which, the Chinese say, are caused by their own destitute spirits, are caused by the foreign destitute spirits also. If plague, pestilence, or famine break out where foreigners are living in the interior of China, it is almost sure to lead to trouble; indeed some months ago an outbreak of cholera led to a rising among the people, in which two foreigners lost their lives.

It has been already remarked that the Chinese think that the spirit world is very much like this, and this belief leads to some strange results. In this country if a man is angry with another man, it is not uncommon for him to do him some injury, and in some cases even to kill him. In China a man very often, instead of killing his enemy, kills himself. He knows if he goes into the other world and becomes a spirit, he can do far more harm to his enemy than he could by remaining in this world. The number of suicides in China is very remarkable. All the mission hospitals have many such cases taken to them every year, with the hope that those near death may be saved. It has been found that a large percentage of the suicides are caused by quarrels. Many years ago the speaker was called in with a friend to try and save two Buddhist monks who had taken opium with a view to pass into the other world. Upon inquiry it turned out that these men had been quarrelling, and one had taken opium, with the intention of getting into the other world that he might injure his enemy. The enemy heard of this, and at once took a larger dose of opium, with the hope that he might get into the other world first. It may be mentioned that neither of these men succeeded in their object. The judicious use of the bamboo, and the administration of a mixture composed of mustard, yellow soap, and hot water, had the effect of bringing them 'round, and restoring them to their wonted health and spirits.

Shortly after the troubles were over in China two years ago the Powers demanded that two mandarins high in office, who had taken a leading part in the slaughter of the foreigners, should be put to death. In the telegram which came home, announcing that these men had been executed, it was stated that as soon as their heads were struck off they were sewn on again by the assistant executioners. Probably very few readers of this last sentence realized the importance of this statement.

The thousands of Chinese who witnessed the execution doubtless said: "These men cannot have done anything very wrong, or they would not be allowed to retain their heads." In order to make the punishment complete, the heads of these men ought to have been brought to England, or at least sunk in the sea. The fact is that the Chinese believe that a man who is beheaded appears in the other world without a head, and spends the rest of his time there in a headless condition, being laughed and jeered at by all his fellow spirits who have retained their heads. The public executioner in Hangchow made a considerable income by the sale of the heads of the people he decapitated to their friends, that they might be sewn on again. The magistrate generally orders the head of the man who has been decapitated to be exposed for so many days. This is done in order that the friends may not be able to obtain it. While I was in Hangchow, a man, who had been embezzling money and cheating the government, was executed. Because it was not an extreme case, and the man had not committed murder, he was allowed to make arrangements about his head before it was cut off. After much bargaining, the friends were to be allowed to have the head upon payment of about £50 in our money. The last thing that this man saw, before he closed his eyes, and his head was cut off, was a man standing by with a needle and thread; he knew his head would be restored, and he would be all right in the other world, and he died happy.

But the important question must now be asked: Is Ancestral Worship as practised by the Chinese idolatrous? After what has been said, one would think that there would not be much difficulty in answering this question, but of course you are aware some have said that the care for their ancestors is a praiseworthy feature in the Chinese character, and ought not to be discouraged.

At the General Missionary Conference held in Shanghai in 1890, Dr. Martin, the President of the Chinese College in Peking, read a paper entitled, "Ancestral Worship: A plea for toleration," the conclusion of which was: "I respectfully suggest that the missionaries refrain from any interference with the native mode of honouring ancestors, and leave the reformation of the system to the influence of divine truth, when it gets a firmer hold on the national mind." After a very full discussion, the Conference of four hundred missionaries passed almost unanimously the following resolution: "Resolved that this Conference record its dissent from this conclusion, and affirms its belief that idolatry is an essential constituent

of Ancestral Worship." The Rev. Y. K. Yen, a Chinese clergyman of great experience, referring to Dr. Martin's paper, said:—"The belief is an idolatrous belief, and the worship is an idolatrous worship. The two ideas of paying human honours and divine honours to ancestors are so combined that we cannot separate them. I think that to allow the Chinese Christians to perform the worship, and at the same time to eliminate every idea of divine service, cannot be done. The two are so associated that if you do the one the other is involved in it. The association has become so hereditary among the Chinese that to prostrate and make offerings bring up in their minds the feeling that the spirits are present to hear their prayers, accept their gifts, and in return will care for them, in short will do for them what God-over-all can do."

A well known Chinese missionary writes: "That the worship rendered to their ancestors by the Chinese is idolatrous cannot be doubted, and it forms one of the subtlest phases of idolatry, essentially evil, with the guise of goodness, ever established among men."

When the Jesuit missionaries reached China about the year 1582, they sanctioned ancestral worship on the plea that it was a civil rather than a religious rite. Ricci, who died in 1610, in the rules which he left for the direction of the Jesuits, says that the Ancestral Rites might be tolerated in the Chinese converts, because these ceremonies were merely civil and secular. In the year 1651, the Dominicans followed the Jesuits to China, and took the opposite view; they declared the rites to be idolatrous and sinful, and absolutely forbade the converts to engage in them. A contest at once began which lasted for many years. The case was of course referred to Rome; but the Popes seem to have found great difficulty in deciding this important question. In the year 1699, the Jesuits appealed to the Emperor Kang Hyi. "We have always supposed," said they, "that Confucius is honoured as a legislator, and in this character alone are the ceremonies established. We believe that ancestral rites are only observed in order to exhibit the love felt for the departed, and to hallow the remembrance of the good received from them during their lifetime." The following year the Emperor's answer was received; it was short and to the point, viz., "The customs of China are political." But this view of the case did not find favour at Rome, and in 1704, Pope Clement XI. issued a Bull absolutely forbidding Ancestral Worship. The Chinese

Emperor was very angry, and in 1718 forbade any missionary to reside in China, unless he conformed to the rules that Ricci had laid down many years before. The Pope on the other hand refused to allow any European missionary to go to China who declined to obey his decision. The Chinese connected with the Roman Catholic Missions are not now permitted to worship their ancestors.

Whatever the conclusion that foreigners interested in the subject may come to, there can be no doubt that the Chinese Christians themselves look upon Ancestral Worship as idolatrous, and as inconsistent with their profession of Christianity, and surely they are the best judges in this matter.

Although there may be much to be admired from one point of view in Ancestral Worship, it must not be forgotten that many evils may be traced to it.

Polygamy is not only allowed but encouraged. It is a religious duty for a man who has no son to take another wife, with the hope that a son may be born to offer the ancestral sacrifices. There can be no greater calamity than for a man to die without an heir.

That Ancestral Worship is responsible for a great deal of the infanticide common in many parts of China there can be no doubt. Daughters are not wanted, because they cannot take part in the ancestral rites. In the great Chu-ki district, about two hundred miles from Shanghai, where infanticide was very common, it was universally believed that a baby without teeth had no soul. Such a little one, dying, was wrapped in matting, and left anywhere in the fields, generally being eaten by the dogs. But if the baby had but one tooth, the soul was supposed to have come, and a box was provided for burial.

The annual cost of Ancestral Worship must be noticed. It has been carefully computed that the expenditure by families to secure the repose of their deceased members, comes to no less than £24,000,000 annually, and to this must be added the sum spent by charitable societies, for the support of the destitute spirits, who have no friends to care for them, which probably comes to about £6,000,000. We believe that we are well within the mark when we decide that the total amount spent by the Chinese on the spirits of the dead, comes to the enormous sum of £30,000,000 annually. It must be remembered that this immense sum expended on the dead is not prompted by true charity, but by servile fear. The living are indeed the slaves of the dead.

But it is time to bring this paper to a close. Very much more might be said on this very interesting subject, but time forbids. I trust enough has been said to make us thankful for the light that shines in England, for we cannot help contrasting this belief of the Chinese with the glorious hope brought before us in the Bible. The poor Chinaman, when leaving this world, can only hope that he will not be forgotten by his friends, that the necessary offerings will be sent after him, that he may not become hungry and destitute in the place to which he is going, but the Christian knows that in that place to which he is going every want will be supplied, and he can look forward without fear to the time when he will join the great company who have come out of great tribulation, and who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; of whom it is written: "therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN.—Ladies and gentlemen, I think you have almost anticipated me by the hearty manner in which you have applauded this very interesting paper on ancestral worship in China. I am sure I, for one, have learnt a great deal of a subject of which I was extremely ignorant before. I think we have all got a great deal of information to-night on superstitious and hereditary practices of one of the most ancient nations of the globe, and of their ideas of the future state.

I invite anyone who wishes to speak to take part in the discussion.

Colonel MACKINLAY.—I should like to thank the author and to ask him three questions. Whether he considers that the Thummim mentioned in the Bible resembles the present ancestral worship, and when these tablets are placed in their houses, do they take them

away with them when they move from house to house, and are they used for the purpose of divination or guidance ?

The AUTHOR.—The first question I do not feel in a position to answer ; it is a very deep subject.

Certainly the Chinese take these ancestral tablets about with them, for they think the souls of the departed actually inhabit those tablets, “the throne of the soul” it means. Sometimes the tablet is called “the wooden lord” ; but it is, generally, “the throne of the soul.”

There is great difficulty in colonising with regard to China. A Chinaman, dying in America, cannot get the clothes or offerings that he could in China. The Chinese want to be buried where they are born, and the reason is that they may take part in the ancestral offerings which they are offered from time to time.

Colonel MACKINLAY.—Where are they placed ? In the entrance to houses ?

The AUTHOR.—I do not think there is any special place for them. The Chinese always have a reception room, and sometimes they are placed in the reception room. They have in nearly every village a small ancestral hall, as it is called, arranged with steps half-way up and enough room for each family.

Professor ORCHARD.—May I ask do the Chinese pray to their ancestors ? I suppose the Emperor prays ; but do the common people pray to their ancestors ? Why do the Chinese consider that amongst the necessary things of which the departed spirit is supposed to have need, that food alone must be visible and cannot be vapourised ? Is the idea that the spirit has to come to this world for its food, or what is the explanation of that curious exception to the rule ?

The AUTHOR.—There are so many very interesting questions that can be asked that I should like myself to seek to get an answer to them. The difficulty in dealing with the Chinese is that they cannot answer these questions themselves. So many of their practices have been passed down from ancient times, some for hundreds of years. You may ask a Chinaman a certain thing and all he can tell you is that his father and grandfather did it. He does not inquire why or wherefore, but the very fact that his grandfather did it, seems to settle the whole thing.



With regard to the food, certainly the spirit must actually come to the table. The Chinese say the spirits feed on the steam. The things placed on the table are all hot invariably. They never think of offering anything cold to the spirits. The table is prepared and the food is prepared in the kitchen and taken up and put steaming hot on the table, and the spirits are supposed to inhale the steam from the food, and, as the Chinese say, they have a wonderful power of extracting all the goodness and strength of it although the food remains as before. The only thing is it gradually gets cold, and then the people who put it there come round and eat it. The same in the temple. I have seen idols made of clay or mud and a table with food on it just the same as that of the ancestors. There, again, the food is put there for a time and then the priests, or somebody, would eat it.

Mr. MARTIN ROUSE.—Do they know that the people eat it?

The AUTHOR.—Oh yes; the friends know it. The family gather together and offer these sacrifices to those who have passed away.

In regard to the prayers to the spirits, there are most devout prayers on record to these spirits, and they all know of these things that are offered to the spirits, for if they are not offered, then the spirit, it is supposed, has an extraordinary power of coming back to the world and doing an immense amount of harm. It is extraordinary what harm a destitute spirit can do.

Their charitable societies referred to consist of rows of almshouses; for instance, soup kitchens, blanket societies, coffin societies and burial societies. I remember seeing in Shanghai a house with a large doorway over which was written, *Aun Shen* (Benevolent Institution). I thought it was for the poor, but was told it was a benevolent institution for the spirits of the other world and not for people in this world at all. No doubt the English who lived in Shanghai thought it was an institution for the care of spirits in this world rather than for those of the other world.

Rev. F. STORRS TURNER.—I think I ought to take the opportunity of saying that in a great many respects I could, if time permitted, parallel some of those very interesting points that Mr. Elwin has laid before us.

To begin with, I have at home two ancestral tablets given to me more than forty years ago: I have three in fact. One of them is a clan tablet, but two are family tablets, given to me by a convert of

the province of Canton, and the occasion was one of great joy to me ; for it is well known that it is extremely hard for a Chinaman to part with his ancestral tablets. As far as I know, I was the only missionary at that time, in our part of China, in possession of any tablets at all. Those two tablets have names inside, written plainly in black ink. I could also give parallel cases of what could be called Christian exorcism, very similar to those set before them by Mr. Elwin ; but I must confine myself to the subject of the evening, which appears to me to be of great interest. In the main I entirely agree with the general view that Mr. Elwin has set before us ; but I am not quite sure that we ought to call ancestral worship "an idolatrous" custom. Tablets are not idols, but simply records of the names of the deceased, and I hardly think it can be said that these deceased spirits are deified. Rather is it like the case of the Roman Catholic devotion to saints ; but, any way, it appears to me that the subject has very great interest from a point of view which has not been mentioned.

We all know that the origin of religion was attributed by the late Herbert Spencer to spirit worship. His formula is very simple. Dreams gave rise to the notion of a separable soul. Dreams of dead enemies gave the notion that they were still existing. Dreams of a dead chief who had been in his lifetime of great power, ferocity and cunning, and had made himself feared, produced the idea that he was a powerful spirit in the other world, and this powerful spirit was the first god : from this origin Herbert Spencer teaches that all religion has resulted in the whole world. It seems to me, if we were to study Chinese history, it ought to throw some light on this subject. The worship of deceased spirits is a very important part of Chinese religion, and we should be able, I think, if the theory is true, to find something in Chinese books to support Herbert Spencer's theory.

Now I think we ought to distinguish between three periods : the ancient history of China, what I may call the middle history of China, and that of the present day. In fact, a very large portion of what has been stated this evening about spirit worship in China is unknown in the ancient books. If we go back to the old books of history and poetry, and study the subject, there I think we shall see plainly that worship was paid to the spirits of deceased kings, princes, ministers, and persons of importance ;

what we at least would call religious worship. People were prayed to. Thanks were given to them. I remember that an ode written at the time of great famine and drought over the land, speaks of offerings made to the spirits. The living ruler says, "I have made my prayer to God, and He does not hear. I have worshipped in the proper way all the former rulers and ministers of state, and they do not help." But when we study those ancient books what we find is this, that there are different kinds of worship; but above all there is the one heaven and one God, alone, unapproachable.

Now there is no measuring the gulf between spirits and God. The ancient religion of China certainly is not based on the worship of spirits, and to find any connection whatever between the worship of those spirits and the worship of God is impossible. The more you study the subject the more you will see that to regard one as the result of the other would be a great mistake.

But when we come down to the time of Confucius then we find a different state of things. We find then, in the Confucian writings, no alteration of rites and ceremonies. He says, "I am one who hands down; I am not an inventor." Everything that was done in the old dynasty had to be done in the same way. You cannot find anything like a trace of worship of spirits as gods. On the contrary you find all that Confucius cared about was the homage paid to the ancestors as a token of filial piety.

It seems to me we should find this subject well worth study; but as regards the present day belief of China all I can say is I found it extremely difficult to discover what a Chinaman does believe. It is a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taouism. He believes everything in a way, but hardly anything in reality. He has a vague belief that something may come after this life that may be judgment, and no doubt they believe in ghosts and in the mischief they do, and their power to do evil. All these things are confused in his mind, which is pervaded by a superstition from which he cannot get himself freed.

Colonel HENDLEY, C.S.I.—I would ask how this worship was arrived at, which seems so old, and how long has the need for offerings extended? Has it extended from father to grandfather, and so on to remote degrees? I should also like to ask whether the Chinese regard their ancestors in the same light as protecting spirits.

and is this the reason why they worship them? The lecturer says in his lecture that their respect for spirits was due to their holding property. There was a discussion about this some years ago, when Dr. Yates said it did not exist, and Dr. Smith opposed, believing it to be a mixture of fear and self-love, and that it is only a gradual process that leads the Chinaman to become one who reveres his ancestors.

Then as to a child being lucky who is born with teeth. A child was brought to me when in India some time ago, who had one tooth when born, and it was considered to be extremely unlucky. I said it did not much matter who thought so; but the tooth was pulled out, and no one would allow their child to marry that child when it grew up.

Then as to the ceremonial in regard to departed spirits in the wards of the large hospitals of India, it is a common thing to perform what they consider the necessary rites before the spirit is disembodied and set free and no longer torments the living. That goes on from generation to generation; so that when a man performs the ceremonial over his own father he also remembers his ancestors.

The CHAIRMAN, in thanking the author for his paper, referred to parallel cases of ancestral worship in India, which were referred to in the Greek and Latin classics. He had himself seen preserved food for the spirits consisting of ears of corn, locusts and dried dates. Their ideas of the spirit world appeared to be much the same—only the Greek idea seemed to have sprung from the vision of Tartarus that Ulysses had, and the idea that Homer must have taken from the western fields of Asia had become the conception in all nations of the future Hades.

A MEMBER.—Can anyone trace how this ancestral worship begun? We are all agreed on this—that all worship begun with a knowledge of the true God, and every form of idolatry and superstition is some corruption of a deviation from the true path, which is not Herbert Spencer's idea of evolution of religion by degrees. Does Mr. Elwin know how ancestral worship began to come in as one of the forms of deviation from true worship?

The AUTHOR.—I do not know that there is anything to go upon certainly in China it is lost in far antiquity. They seem from the earliest times to have had this ancestral worship.

As to the question of expenditure of thirty millions on ancestral

worship it seems an enormous sum, but it has been calculated carefully. We know how many charitable and other societies there are and about how many families. It is supposed that each family spends about 3s. a year on ancestral worship, and taking the population of China at about 400,000,000 we arrive at that figure. Dr. Yates, who has been mentioned, works this out and comes to that conclusion.

It is very interesting to hear of these other places where there are parallel instances of ancestral worship.

Mr. MARTIN ROUSE.—I do not know whether I am unduly prolonging the debate; but that question surely can be precisely answered.

From what I know of oriental antiquity, did not the Assyrians worship Asshur, who the Bible informs us was their first ancestor who began that kingdom, and did not Babylon, as proved by Dr. Pinches, worship Nimrod under the name of Merodach\* and Nebuchadnezzar calls him lord of Merodach. So I do not think there can be a shadow of doubt about that. Those men, who were great commanders, and who founded Empires, were doubtless the origin of the worship of ancestors. We heard this afternoon that the first persons we hear of as prayers being addressed to them, were kings and statesmen. That, surely, is only spreading out the first idea.

Mr. STORRS TURNER.—But in China you find no Nimrod amongst the deities.

Mr. MARTIN ROUSE.—But if they prayed to him as the Assyrians prayed to Asshur, surely that is the original form of ancestral worship.

Mr. STORRS TURNER.—I cannot take that view at all. Those are the exceptional cases.

The SECRETARY.—It is clear that there is a difference of opinion between Mr. Elwin, who read this interesting paper, and Mr. Turner, whether ancestral worship is idolatrous or not. Mr. Storrs Turner considers it is not so.

Mr. STORRS TURNER.—It is in a corrupt stage at the present time, no doubt.

The Meeting then closed.

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\* See *Trans.*, vol. xxxv, p. 27.