

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD.

The church can best appreciate her own position of special favor at this time by contrast with the actual condition of the rest of the world. And a little reflection upon the world's condition of superstition and ignorance should bring us, not only into a fuller appreciation of our own privileges, but also into sympathy and pity for the world in its present cheerless gloom and aimless gropings in the dark. The thought should never be lost sight of, that what we receive as special favor from God is not for selfish gratification, but for the universal blessing of all his creatures. And only such as have this benevolent disposition to bless, who look forward to the prize of our high calling with special delight because of its grand opportunities to lift up the fallen, to liberate the captives of sin and death, to recover sight to the blind, to fill the earth with the knowledge of the truth and to lead all mankind along the highway of holiness to everlasting life and to the true end of human existence, which is to glorify God in the completeness and grandeur of true manhood and to enjoy his favor forever, will be counted worthy to reign with Christ.

Let us take a glimpse then at the world's present religious condition:--

The principal religions of the world outside of Christianity are Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Mohammedanism. These with the various corrupt forms of Christianity sway the minds of almost the entire population of the earth. The exceptions are some savage and half-civilized tribes in central and southern Africa, the Esquimaux of the far north, some islands of the seas, and the Indian tribes of America, all of whom have crude ideas of their own, very generally remote from the truth and giving evidence of fearful forebodings or cheerless gloom in view of the uncertainties of future existence, or the conditions under which existence may be perpetuated beyond the tomb.

Brahmanism is the prevailing religion of Hindoostan, and its adherents are estimated to number from 120,000,000 to 150,000,000. Its age is uncertain, as its literature presents neither history, annals nor chronology, though it is probable that it existed some centuries before Christ, as its sacred books extend back from twenty to thirty centuries. Its theology is a chaotic mass of dreamy speculation having no well ordered system of thought. It is described as not a system, but a medley, and not a philosophy, but a dream. Its sacred books are the Vedas and the Institutes of Manu. From the former it appears that anciently the Brahmans were worshippers of the elements-- light, fire, water, etc.

In theory their religion rests upon the Laws of Manu. This work sustains the laws of caste and the authority of the priesthood, represents Brahma as the supreme deity and self-sacrifice (self-inflicted torments) as the supreme duty. It presents elaborate, ritualistic and ceremonial rules of the most exacting character, and promulgates the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Though Brahmanism has many gods, its one supreme god is Brahm; and according to its philosophy Brahm is the only being in the universe who actually exists: all else is illusory, not real. It is said that in order to put forth his energy Brahm took upon himself bodily form and became three gods-- Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and to these three were intrusted the arrangement and government of the universe after Brahm had relapsed into his proper state of unconscious sleep.

The highest future bliss to which the Brahmanist aspires is absorption into Brahm; and as his normal condition is presumed to be that of unconscious sleep, absorption into Brahm would signify nothing more than annihilation. However, before he reaches this consummation of his hopes, the Brahmanist expects to pass through a series of transmigrations, until deemed worthy of it. His desire is to so act in the present life as to rise a grade higher in the next birth. If he has been wicked he will be a step lower, or if very wicked he will be sent to one or other of the innumerable hells to expiate his guilt and to reappear on earth in mineral, vegetable or animal form before he rises again to the human. Or if counted worthy to advance upward he

enjoys a heaven of carnal delights with one or other of the superior gods. His worthiness of future reward, however, is not made dependent upon actual virtue, but rather upon conformity to Brahman rites and ceremonies, the liberal support of the priesthood, etc. Prayers and painful penances take the place of true devotion, and even suicide is recommended as particularly meritorious; and as a consequence, it is said that numbers annually throw themselves over precipices, bury themselves alive in graves dug by their nearest kindred, or drown themselves in some of the sacred rivers. And voluntary widow-burning and infanticide were common until suppressed by the British government in 1830, though it is still practiced in some parts, and doubtless will be until the old superstition as to its merit has passed away. Some of the penances performed by zealous Brahmans have been of the most revolting character; as for instance, crawling for miles on hands and knees over sharp stones, holding up an arm above the head for months, cutting themselves, disfiguring themselves, etc.

All India is divided into four castes-- the Brahmans or priestly class; a military class; a mercantile class; and a servile class; but the Brahman or priestly class is the favored and oppressive one. These live on alms and are supported liberally by kings and people, as the priesthood of the Church of Rome and others are. In fact so similar is the power of Brahmanism to bind its blind votaries to servile submission to the dictates of the Brahman or priestly class, that the system has been named the Romanism of India. [R1184 : page 3]

Buddhism.--The despotism of the Brahmans gave rise in the seventh century B.C. to Buddhism, which was a protest against the corrupt religion of that age. It has been called the Protestantism of India. Though born in Hindoostan, it now has little sway there; but it has full sway in Ceylon and the eastern peninsula. It claims nearly two-thirds of the population of China. It prevails also in Japan and north of the Himalayas, in Thibet, among the Mongolian population of Central Asia, and extends into Siberia and Swedish Lapland. Its adherents are estimated at from 300,000,000 to 400,000,000 --more than one third of the human race.

Its founder is said to have been a certain prince named Gotama, afterward called Buddha, though the legends concerning him partake so much of the character of fiction as to leave it somewhat uncertain whether such a person actually existed. However, the ideas ascribed to him are the foundation principles of Buddhism. The system assumes that existence is the cause of all evil, that ignorance is the ultimate cause of existence; and that, therefore, with the removal of ignorance, existence and all its attendant miseries would be cut off.

Buddhism is more properly termed a system of philosophy than of theology; for it has no god. It recognizes no being with greater supernatural power than man is supposed capable of attaining by virtue, austerity and wisdom. Disgusted with the many gods of Brahmanism and the priestcraft that imposed upon a superstitious people, Buddhism, at least in its early and purer form, taught that religious excellence consists only in wisdom and personal virtue. Buddhism renounces the many gods of Brahmanism, discards all idea and necessity for a priesthood, and does away with all caste. Instead of a god they set up an ideal character which they term Buddha, not for worship, but for the imitation of mankind. And though an image of Buddha adorns the center of the Buddhist temple, and before it offerings of fruit and flowers are placed, the ceremonies are not viewed by intelligent Buddhists as acts of worship, but as simply commemorative of a character worthy of remembrance and imitation; for Buddha, it was claimed, was nothing more than what any good man may become. The more ignorant, however, regard him as a deity.

Instead of believing the future of the soul to be dependent upon an infallible priestly class, it is believed to depend wholly upon the operation of inflexible law. And instead of the prayers and penances prescribed by Brahmanism, Buddhism counsels temperance, justice, honesty, truth, repentance and confession of sin and reformation of character, claiming that these principles alone are the conditions of virtue and true happiness. And in the absence of a knowledge of the true God it appeals to and glorifies human reason and conscience only.

The original idea of Buddhism was indeed a noble one. It was an effort to cast off the fetters of blind

superstition, and a bold strike for individual liberty; and it gives evidence of a sincere desire for truth and righteousness and a struggle against great opposition to attain it. In the absence of a knowledge of God, it was an endeavor to follow the clearest light they possessed, viz., reason and conscience; though with the ignorant who failed to catch the true idea of the commemoration of Buddha's memory, the ceremonies have degenerated into a meaningless idolatry, of which the prayer-mill is a prominent feature in some countries. And though the system provides for no priests, a class of self-appointed mendicants corresponds somewhat to a priestly class, but its only clerical function is to read the Buddhist scriptures on stated occasions, or to run the prayer-mill for the people, for which they receive a small compensation.

Though Buddhism was almost a complete revolution of thought from Brahmanism, yet it carried with it the absurd doctrine of the transmigration of souls and of numerous heavens for the good according to merit, and about 136 hells situated inside the earth for the wicked, according to their deserts. And the gloomy end, whenever or however reached, is annihilation for good and bad alike. The highest incentive to virtue which the system presents is the speedy arrival at the end of existence; for misery, it is believed, is not merely a taint in existence, but the very essence of it.

Confucianism is also a philosophy rather than a religion, and having its beginning only a century later than Buddhism (the sixth century B.C.) it very closely resembles that system; and though Buddhism claims about two thirds of the population of China, Confucianism is the basis of the social and political life of that nation. Confucius (whose original name was Kong until Latinized by the Jesuit missionaries,) is described as a grave, sober, upright and thoughtful man, with high moral and intellectual attainments and aspirations.

Carefully trained by a widowed mother, he early developed these traits of character, and at her death, reviving an ancient custom, he spent three years in mourning for her, devoting his time and thought to the study of moral philosophy by reflection upon the principles of moral law, furnished by conscience and reason. After this he traveled extensively throughout the kingdom of China, preaching his doctrines, and though for a time he labored against great opposition and even persecution, as all reformers do, his reputation as a public reformer soon became very great, his followers being mainly persons of middle and mature age--grave, sober, thoughtful and respectable citizens, many of them occupying important public stations. His system has no god, no priesthood, no temple, and it regards the universe as a grand self-sustaining order. It rather doubts a future existence, yet conforms to certain ancient religious ceremonies on the presumption that some future good *may accrue* from so doing-- "There may be some meaning in them," said Confucius, "and they may affect your welfare in a way you do not know of. As for the genii and spirits, sacrifice to them. I have nothing to tell regarding them, whether they exist or not; but their worship is part of an august and awful ceremonial which a wise man will not neglect nor despise." This ignorance of things unseen and future, yet fear or hope concerning them, is the foundation for many absurd superstitions among the Chinese, such as scaring away the devils with noisy demonstrations, and the disallowance of telegraph wires and railroads for fear of offending the spirits of the winds, etc.

It was the special endeavor of Confucius to direct the attention of men to the duties of social and political life. He said, "I teach you nothing but what you might learn yourselves, viz., the observance of three fundamental laws of relation, between sovereign and subject, father and child, husband and wife; and the five capital virtues,--universal charity, impartial [R1184 : page 4] justice, conformity to ceremonies and established usages, rectitude of heart and mind, and pure sincerity." This, in fact, is the whole doctrine of Confucianism in a nutshell. By the education of the masses according to these principles, he believed and taught that the elevation and happiness of men would be secured; and accordingly schools are established throughout the length and breadth of the Chinese empire. The writings of Confucius, which were designed to perpetuate his doctrines of moral philosophy and political economy, are read with great solemnity on the first and fifteenth of every month by a mandarin [a civil officer] in robes of ceremony. The veneration of Confucius by the Chinese amounts to worship among the masses, but like that of the Buddhists for Buddha, it is, strictly speaking, only commemorative of the memory of a good man. Throughout China there are temples erected to

his memory, adorned with ancestral tablets, the center of which is that of Confucius. And to these offerings, etc., are presented.

Mohammedanism--dates from the seventh century A.D., fourteen centuries later than Buddhism and thirteen later than Confucianism. It prevails chiefly in Turkey, Africa, Asia, Persia and parts of India, and its adherents number from 130,000,000 to 150,000,000 of people. In the fifteenth century, having penetrated Europe, it became a formidable foe to Christianity. Its founder, Mohammed, accepted both the Old and New Testament Scriptures and claimed to be the Comforter promised by Christ. The Koran, however, he claimed as superior to the Bible, asserting that it is as old as God himself and that it was conveyed to the lowest heaven by Gabriel and thence to himself. The Koran is, therefore, the sacred and authoritative book among the followers of Mohammed.

Their religion partakes somewhat of the nature of both Judaism and Christianity. It presents one God and various ranks of angels. Mohammedans believe that Christ was a great prophet. They deny the idea of a trinity, believe in the resurrection of the dead, a final judgment, and a future state of rewards and punishments in heaven and hell. They teach that the dead have an intermediate conscious existence between death and resurrection, and that they dwell somewhere near the place where the dust of the body reposes. They are extreme believers in predestination. Friday is their sabbath; they must pray five times a day, fast and give alms, and must go to Mecca, their sacred city, once during life, either personally or by a substitute.

Nothing more praiseworthy can be said of Mohammed than that he was a great and successful fanatic and impostor, having nothing of the high-toned moral character which history ascribes to the founders of both Buddhism and Confucianism. His religion is a miserable hash of Christianity, Judaism and a former heathen idolatry and superstition; and its aggressive character was signalized by determined efforts to conquer the world with carnal weapons. In recent years it has made considerable progress in India in displacing Brahmanism.

Such is the religious condition of what is commonly known as the heathen world. **[R1185 : page 4]** Truly it has its lights and shadows. In the midst of the gloom of ignorance of God, and of human history, and of the true end of human existence, it is pleasing to note that some noble souls struggled after righteousness, sought earnestly for truth and zealously endeavored to lift up a standard of righteousness for the people. And when we consider the disabilities under which such labored, and the poor incentives which their lame reasonings discerned, we can only admire their true nobility of character in following the guidance of reason and conscience. And while we realize a blessed freedom from the superstitions which bound them, we dare not take to ourselves the credit of superior wisdom or virtue, but must ascribe all we have, over and above what they had, to the superior advantages of our favored circumstances under divine providence.

Glancing at the view of the world's condition presented in DAWN, Vol. I., page 16, we see that it is indeed a dark picture. Out of a population of 1,424,000,000, how small a proportion are even nominally Christian. And how corrupt and debasing, and how thoroughly anti-Christian are the great and powerful systems which claim the name of Christ, only the more thoroughly to impose upon the ignorance and credulity of mankind.

The great Roman and Greek Catholic churches, originally one, and only separated by the spirit of rivalry and strife to be greatest, hold sway over the minds of 274,000,000 of people, and to a great extent also over 116,000,000 more through their system of errors which still clings to Protestantism. The Catholic Church is the organized development of that great falling away from the doctrine of the Lord and the apostles, which began to be established about the third century. The eleventh century witnessed the separation of the eastern and western churches--the Greek and the Roman Catholic, each of which has since been torn by many dissensions and involved in many unsavory disputes and quarrels. But how do their doctrines compare with the heathen philosophies above named? They talk much of their zeal for the conversion of the "benighted heathen" nations, but to what would they convert them?

Let us see: Professing to know God and holding in their possession for centuries past the divine revelation, contrary to that revelation they misrepresent God as a character so abominable and detestable in unrivaled cruelty, malice, vindictiveness and hate, that the heathen mind turns away in horrified disgust, as every missionary to foreign lands will testify and as many leading missionaries have disconsolately reported to the home boards who sent them out. (See TOWERS of June and November, 1888.) The heathen have no faith in a god who could deliberately plan to eternally torment the creatures he has made and professes to love.

The central feature of Catholic doctrine is the mass, in which bread and wine are considered to be changed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ and sacrificed each time afresh, as an atonement for sins, by priests, as instead of the one continual sacrifice of Christ on Calvary for the sins of the world, which it sets aside as insufficient. And the power to forgive sins and absolve from guilt, thus presumably placed in the hands of a self-exalted and often corrupt priesthood, led to the doctrines of penance, auricular confession, indulgences, etc. When these had gained a firm and substantial basis, the whole body of nominal Christians were thereby plunged into an abyss of superstition and servile obedience to the machinations of a priesthood more tyrannical than the grossest forms of heathenism, and into an idolatry as debasing as any the world ever witnessed--a worship and adoration of angels, of the human mother of our Lord, and of fallible and often corrupt and abominable characters who were canonized as saints by the high-priests of Romanism. And its supposed meritorious prayers and tormenting penances, its debasing servility to a tyrannical priesthood of supposed absolute power over the present and future life, its monstrous system of indulgences and its abominable persecutions of truth and righteousness, mark the great Antichrist as the most desolating abomination that ever cursed the earth.

While all this is applicable with greatest force to the Church of Rome, the Greek Church has little indeed to boast of a more favorable character. And all who have come out from that great anti-Christian system, and stopped short of an entire cleansing from her pollutions, have much whereof to be ashamed. This is true, in varying measure, of every sect of what Romanists call the Protestant Sedition.

If the creeds and practices of nominal Christianity were a fair representation of the doctrines of Christ, many of the heathen philosophies would rank its equals, if not its superiors. And many honest skeptics, failing to discern the grains of wheat among the chaff and tares, and the pure seed of truth among the many counterfeit errors, have rejected the Way, the Truth and the Life whom they otherwise would have welcomed and shall yet know and accept. But, thank God, he has not left himself without a witness in the world. He has his grains of wheat, though they be "few" and unrecognized by the world and its historians. And while darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people, while the nations have for many long centuries forgotten God and almost erased his image from their hearts, God has always had a people, a few, who retained his memory and endeavored to follow his leading--in remote ages a few solitary patriarchs, then a small nation, then Jehovah's Anointed came and a faithful few of that small nation received him and formed the nucleus of the Christian Church; and all through the centuries of the Christian era such have been added to that nucleus as shall be saved in the first resurrection at the end of this age--in all a "little flock." But blessed and holy are all they that have part in the first resurrection.

This little flock of the true friends of God have during the Gospel age been "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." And though their light has not yet enlightened all, we rejoice to know that this body of Christ, with Jesus their Head, is the true light which in due time shall enlighten every man, the Sun of righteousness which shall arise with healing beams to enlighten and bless the world. ([Matt. 13:43](#); [Mal. 4:2](#).) Yes, ere long it shall be the "city set on a hill" --the "New Jerusalem"--"which *cannot be hid*." ([Matt. 5:13,14](#).) And though its place during the Gospel age has been in the wilderness, though it has been unknown and unrecognized by the world as the church, (as a religious system,) and though, like their Lord, they have been despised and rejected of men, persecuted as heretics and esteemed the filth and offscouring of the earth, nevertheless, they have truly been, even under these unfavorable circumstances, the very salt of the earth, and their sufferings for righteousness sake have been sacrifices of sweet savor unto God.

The principles of truth and righteousness which they perseveringly held and patiently suffered for, often even unto death, and the divine revelation to which they pointed as the source of their faith and hope and the inspiration of their labors and endurance, was not without its effect. The seeds of truth have taken root in many lands and brought forth fruits to the praise of God and the honor of his name. And wherever it sprang up, it, like salt, has had its preservative influence for good, notwithstanding the false systems and their false doctrines and practices. Let all of that little flock, who yet remain, rejoice in the glorious prospect that ere long the whole church, complete and glorified, shall be given the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession, and the right and power to bless all the families of the earth; making plain the paths of righteousness, casting up a highway for the people and gathering out the stones; lifting up a standard for the people, inspiring all hearts with joyful hope, unstopping deaf ears and opening blind eyes, rewarding righteousness and correcting iniquity, and eventually wiping all tears from off all faces. And they shall come with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, because ignorance and superstition and sin and death shall be no more.

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