

CONFUCIUS



COLLECTED WRITINGS
OF CONFUCIUS + THE LIFE,
LABOURS AND DOCTRINES
OF CONFUCIUS

Confucius, Tsang, Edward Harper Parker

**Collected Writings of
Confucius + The Life,
Labours and Doctrines of
Confucius
(6 books in one volume)**

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The Life, Labours and Doctrines of Confucius - Edward Harper Parker

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IN order to obtain a clear notion of our subject, it is desirable to explain who Confucius was, and the condition of the social life amid which he lived.

If the reader will look at the map, he will be surprised to see that the China of those days was practically confined to the valley of the Hwang Ho, (which means "Yellow-River"), taken in its broadest sense. I mean that the river which is commonly spoken of as "China's Sorrow" has at different periods entered the sea through channels both north and south of its present course ; has, in fact, taken temporary possession of other river valleys and channels. The China of Confucius' time was, then, confined to the tract of country east of the Great Bend, where the river leaves Tartary for good ; and was enclosed or bounded north and south by the most outerly of those streams which have at any time been connected with the Yellow River system.

We know very little of China previous to Confucius' time (sixth century before Christ), but what little we do know was sifted for us and transmitted by Confucius. We may sum it up in a few words. The written character in an antique form had certainly existed for several thousand years, but it is quite uncertain how many : the best authorities say 3,000, that is 5,000 from now. Very recent discoveries in Babylonia have revealed to us original Sumerian cuneiform records on a wholesale scale, written in clay, and dating at least 5,000 years back ; but there are no such original ancient records in China, nor is there any trace of the Chinese ever having written in clay, still less of there being any connection between Chinese and those western hieroglyphs which

preceded cuneiform. Several dynasties had existed, and the rulers of these had shifted their capitals from time to time according to the vagaries of the Yellow River. One of their chief cares was to deal with the havoc wrought or threatened by the floods which resulted from these fluvial irregularities. But although the earliest Chinese literature reaches -back 4,000 years, the older records are so brief and laconic that we derive no satisfactory mental picture from them.

In the time of Confucius the imperial power had dwindled down almost to nothing, and the appanage States of the vassal princes, most of which had been conferred originally upon kinsmen of the King (for the more modern title of hwang-ti or " Emperor," which in those days applied to the Supreme God, and thence only by extension to past Emperors, had not yet assumed its present definite form), were almost independent. The condition of China was, in fact, almost exactly like that of France before Louis the Eleventh broke the power of the vassal dukes and counts ; and the position of the Chinese King, as a moral head over all men, was not unlike the present position of the Pope as the moral head of Christendom: he was towards the end as much a prisoner as a monarch ; his temporal sway was almost reduced to his immediate surroundings, and the whims of feudatories, coupled with the infiltration of barbarian customs, were gradually corrupting the old polity. Not only were the vassal principalities, dukedoms, and counties insubordinate in relation to the King, but their own counts, barons, and squires were equally presumptuous towards themselves ; and it was into this chaotic condition of society and policy, where each clever man was fighting for his own hand alone, that Confucius was ushered at his birth.

The ancestors of Confucius could, at the time of his birth in the year 551 before Christ, be traced back in a way for over two thousand years; but, as we know next to nothing of

practical history previous to his time, it is futile to pursue enquiry into remote family matters. Where nothing is known of an extinct genus^ it is vain to enquire into its species. The royal dynasty nominally ruling in Confucius' time began 671 years before his birth, and one of Confucius' ancestors, who was a half-brother of the last monarch of the dethroned dynasty, was enfeoffed in a State called Sung, the capital of which I mark in the map with, a cross. About 250 years before Confucius' birth, the reigning duke of this state resigned his rights of succession to a younger brother. The elder brother and his heirs were thus for ever cut off from the ducal succession, and the customary law of China then was that, after five generations, a branch of the reigning family must found a new gens or clan of his own. So, then, it came to pass that K'ung-fu-kia, fifth in descent from the abdicating duke, gave the first syllable of his name as a clan name to his heirs. The great-grandson of the man who thus founded in its strict or narrower sense the family of K'ung was the great-grandfather of the philosopher. In Chinese the word fu-tsz has very much the same meaning, by extension, as the Latin word prudens ; and the responsa prudentum, or "legal dicta" of such Roman teachers as Paul, Papinian, Ulpian, and others, were very like the wise sayings of such fu-tsz as Confucius and Mencius. K'ung-fu-tsz, or " the learned K'ung," was too difficult a polysyllable for the Portuguese Jesuits who first came to China to pronounce accurately, and accordingly they latinised it into Confucius, or, as most Europeans would still pronounce it, Confutsitis.

K'ung means a " hole, *and, by extension, " a peacock," apparently* because that bird has a number of eyes or holes in its tail. Fu means vir y *i.e.* a man or husband ; and tsz, meaning " a child," is simply a diminutive, just as homunculus is the diminutive of homo, u a human being," in Latin ; or as Mdnchen is a diminutive of Mann^ " a man or husband," in German. Peacocks were most probably unknown in North China when Confucius lived, hence his

name must be translated " Mr. Hole," and not " Mr. Peacock " ; and Confucius was the seventh of the Hole family counting from the time when that name was assumed ; or the twelfth of the family counting from the time when the reigning duke resigned his rights to a younger brother.

The great-grandfather of Confucius was obliged to fly from the duchy on account of some political trouble, and he became a citizen of a neighbouring state called Lu. His grandson, the father of Confucius, became an officer of state, and distinguished himself by proficiency in the warlike arts. He was ten feet in height ; but the learned are still disputing the question of ancient feet : probably a foot was then 8 inches, as now measured, and Confucius' father would thus be six feet eight inches in height, by no means a very rare thing even with modern Chinamen of the north. This promising soldier had nine daughters borne to him in succession by his wife. In China there can, except under very special circumstances, only be one strictly legal wife, but should this wife fail to present her lord with a son, it was and is still permissible to take a wife of the second class, or, in Scriptural language, a handmaid, who may in certain eventualities hope for future promotion to the full rank of wife. The present Empress-Dowager of China is a case in point. She was originally a handmaid, but after giving birth to the last Emperor, she was promoted in 1858 to the rank of Empress, and for many years acted as joint regent with the Empress-Dowager her senior, who had no children, and died in 1881. It cannot be denied that Confucius' father was very patient with his wife, for it seems he gave her nine chances before he took a handmaid in his despair. This handmaid gave birth to a son, who was a cripple. The gallant soldier was now seventy years of age. In China daughters do not count for so much as sons, and are often killed as useless incumbrances, the great object being to have at least one son to perform religious rites, those rights which the Romans used to call *sacra privata*. Confucius'

father appears to have resolved therefore in his old age to stake everything upon a supreme effort, and he married a mere girl. Either he or she, or both of them, went to pray for a son at a temple on Mount JVi-k'iu, a spot which I mark on the map with a circle. The offspring of the union was Confucius, whose personal name was K'iu, and whose second name was Chung-ni or " Ni the Second " (his crippled brother having been the First). The chief feature in Confucius, as a baby, was that the crown of his head was concave instead of being convex, a peculiarity which must have given him a singular appearance. K I iu means "a mound," and some say he was so called because his forehead protruded. In China personal names of great folk are tabued, sometimes in writing as well as speech. Hence, if it is ever found absolutely necessary to use the word K I iu, the ^difficulty is surmounted by omitting one stroke, and thus making it a little different. In speech the word " So-and-so " is substituted : thus instead of saying " Mr. Mound Hole," the Chinese say "Mr. So-and-so Hole." There is no tabu to the cognomen or second name, and so we have the characters chung-ni in daily use. Owing to one historian having used the expression " wild union " in connection with Confucius' mother, some authors have supposed that the soldier "kept company in the wilderness " ; but judicious commentators explain that a man is not supposed to go a-courting after 64, nor a woman to begin it before 14; and that the "wild union" in question did not refer to the absence of due ceremony in the marriage, but to the fact that the husband was unusually spry and the wife unusually precocious for their respective ages. This interesting event took place in the year 551 before Christ; and two or three years later the father died. He was buried at a spot eight miles east of Confucius' own grave, as will shortly be explained in full.

We may pass rapidly over the events which took place during Confucius' youth. They are of slender importance,

and, such as they are, we know but little of them. At the age of six he was observed to take pleasure in playing with sacrificial vessels and in imitating ceremonial movements, much as English children of the same age sometimes play at holding church services. He is supposed to have gone to school at the age of seven, but the best authorities, Chinese and European, are not satisfied upon this point, which in any case is just what a Chinese boy would do, and still usually does. Confucius himself informs us that, at fifteen, his whole mind was devoted to study. What is certain is that his mother removed with him to the town where his descendants now live : this town is marked on the map with a star, and is eight miles west of the spot where his father was buried. In Chinese it is called J'piih-fu, or, " Crooked Hill," on account of the winding eminence, a mile long, which runs through the city. About 600 years before Confucius' birth, the first Emperor of the imperial dynasty of Chow enfeoffed the regent, his uncle, Duke of Chow, as feudal prince at Crooked Hill, styling this feudal State Lu. It had an area, or perhaps circuit, of 330 English miles. As we shall soon see, the Duke of Chow's tomb is still there and Confucius always took him as a model. Amongst other things Duke Chow invented the compass or " South-pointing cart." The circumstance of our hero's widowed mother being a mere girl, and consequently unable, through maidenly modesty, to follow her venerable husband to the grave, led to Confucius' remaining for some years in ignorance of a fact so transcendently important from a Chinese point of view the exact position of his father's grave : perhaps matters were made worse by the name of his father's village being transferred to the new residence, just as with us Ann Hathaway's cottage might have been called Stratford if Shakespeare's mother had taken him to live there. This circumstance may also account for the conflicting statements of European visitors as to the exact sites of the existing house and temple of the Confucius family.

All authorities clearly agree that Confucius married at the age of 19, that is, after passing 18 new year's days subsequently to his birth; for in China, a man born on the 31st December is considered to be two years old on the following day, whilst a man born on the 2nd of January would still be two years old on the 31st of December in the following year: so that there may be 700 days difference between the ages of two people both nominally in their eighth year. Thus we find, as we go along, that the simplest Chinese facts have to be tested before we can nail them down fairly before our eyes and understandings. In Confucius' case the birth really did take place in the ninth moon, but the next dynasty made some alterations in the calendar, and what was the ninth moon in Confucius' time became the first moon of the following year a few centuries later: moreover, although we are told the exact day, the accounts disagree in such a way that there is a discrepancy of some days to account for. All that we can say for certain, therefore, is that according to our way of reckoning, Confucius was about eighteen when he married.

The next year a son was born, and received the name of "Fish No. 1," with the cognomen of "Carp." This apparently singular choice of names was made in consequence of the reigning duke having sent a congratulatory present of a couple of carp to the young pair. The carp is the king of fish, and no doubt the duke's action had some hidden meaning; just as, in modern marriages, the Chinese often send a couple of geese as a present to wedded couples: the goose is supposed to be the only creature which does not marry again when its spouse dies. Nothing is known of this son except that on two occasions he is recorded to have suddenly come across his father, and to have been severely questioned as to his studies: he seems to have given his father as wide a berth as possible. The fact of the duke having deigned to congratulate a poor man like Confucius is accounted for by the latter having held, at the age of 20,

the post of grain distributor : but here, again, we are confronted with a difficulty ; it is not known whether this means a post in the public granaries, and, if so, central or local ; or whether it means a relief officer. The philosopher Mencius, in alluding to this episode, says that " a superior man may occasionally accept office purely for the relief of his poverty." We may therefore fairly conclude that the duke gave the carp because Confucius was a ducal officer, and that Confucius accepted office, as people do in modern times, to relieve his own poverty.

It is incidentally mentioned in the " Conversations of Confucius " with his disciples that he gave a daughter in marriage. Nothing more. We may therefore once more safely conclude that he had at least one daughter, who, on her marriage, would in accordance with custom cease to belong to his family.

In his 21st year Confucius was promoted or transferred to a post resembling that of estate-agent or watcher over farms ; and a year later he collected round him a number of disciples, much after the fashion of the peripatetic philosophers of Greece. He was six inches taller than his father ; but, if we are to judge of his personal appearance by the pictures and effigies of him still exhibited in his old house, he was far from being a beautiful man, even though he may have been a commanding one. He was strong and well-built, with a large singularly shaped head, full red face, and contemplative, heavy expression. He had a long sparse beard, ill-shaped ears, a thick round-tipped nose, but flat and shovel-like ; two projecting lower teeth, gaping nostrils, and eyes which showed more white than is usual. His back was described by an admirer as being like that of a tortoise. Confucius accepted fees for his instruction, but was more particular about the diligence of the student than the amount of his present. Even at the present day teachers' fees are invariably called " dried meat," or " fuel and

water,” and schoolboys always make periodical presents of food to their masters.

His mother died when he was in his 24th year. Confucius seems to have buried her temporarily whilst he made inquiry touching the exact spot where his father’s body lay : he then opened his father’s grave, and transferred to it the coffin of his mother. Both native and foreign commentators have somewhat confused the facts connected with this event. None of the Europeans who have visited Confucius’ tomb seem to have taken the trouble to pass on to the parents’ grave : even the Emperor of China, who went carefully over all the chief show-places in 1684, contented himself with sending an officer to sacrifice for him at the paternal shrine : but the position is quite certain ; it is at Mount Fang, marked on the map with a black circle. Confucius had to retire from office for 27 months in order to mourn, as the modern Chinese still do, for his mother. He did this so effectively that it took him five days to recover his natural voice after the 27 months had expired. During the next seven years he continued his teachings, besides himself studying music, official formalities, and archaeology. His position was much strengthened when one of the leading men in the state commanded, on his death-bed, that his own son and another relative should join the rising philosopher’s school. The duke liberally placed a carriage and pair at the disposal of Confucius, who proceeded in it to the imperial capital in order to make further learned research. The springless, covered, two-wheeled carts (not unlike a Liverpool market-cart on a small scale), which still ply for hire in the streets of Peking, are exactly the style of vehicle in which Confucius rode 2,400 years ago. At the imperial capital Confucius had interviews with the keeper of the imperial archives, a semi-mythical philosopher named Lao-tso, who founded a rival doctrine or system of mystics called Taoism ; but as Confucius himself said that he was unable to comprehend those misty teachings, and the very

existence of the Taoist philosopher is largely a matter of conjecture, we need not dwell further upon this incident.”^[1] Eighteen years ago I met the individual usually known as the Pope of the Taoist creed, who also enjoys a certain amount of imperial favour. Of course this visit to the capital enhanced the fame of Confucius, who, on his return the same year, was regarded in much the same light as the Mussulmans regard a pilgrim to Mecca, that is, as a haji. He had also taken the opportunity to improve his knowledge of music.

When Confucius was in his 36th year, a civil war broke out in the ducal dominions of Lu, owing to factional disputes with the three leading families ; the ruler was obliged to fly for refuge to the dominions of a neighbour to his north, and Confucius soon followed. According to China’s greatest historian, the origin of the civil war was a disagreement connected with cock-fighting, and it is incidentally mentioned that metal spurs were used by one of the factions. This political quarrelling about cock-fighting has its counterpart in Europe, for it will be remembered that in Justinian’s time the Byzantine court at Constantinople was shaken to its foundations by the faction fights between the red and white, the blue and green parties of the race-course and circus.

Confucius became so enamoured of the music he heard in the country of his temporary adoption that for three months he lost all zest for savoury meats. After he had been six years in the land of Ts’i, the duke of that country expressed a wish to confer a feudal estate upon him ; but one of the local statesmen and one, too, who has left behind him a high reputation for economy and sagacity objected, on the ground that ” these learned fellows are too glib and intractable, too proud and insubmissive, too fond of showy funerals and exaggerated lamentations, too persuasive and fond of borrowing to govern a kingdom.” In truth, the duke

seems to have gradually become rather tired of Confucius, who accordingly betook himself once more to his native land. His disciples were now more numerous than ever. It is interesting to notice that the term which I have here translated "learned fellows" is that which is now applied to Confucianists as distinguished from Taoists and Buddhists : the term is thus older than Confucius, and seems to mean "men of parts."

It was not until his 47th year that Confucius again obtained office ; this was under a new duke, the legitimate ruler, his brother, having four years previously died in the country to which he had fled for asylum. It must be here stated that the dukes of Lu were the direct descendants of Confucius' great model, Duke Chow. A brother or a nephew had occasionally succeeded in the absence of a son ; but, with the exception of an unexplained hiatus between B.C. 920 and 855, the twenty-five dukes had regularly succeeded ever since B.C. 1122, and the reigns of the last eleven of them formed part of Confucius' own original work on history. This fact explains Confucius' great loyalty to his master, who was, in fact, a member of the imperial house, and whose ancestors were tutelary spirits on a subordinate scale. Confucius so reformed the manners of the people in | the district entrusted to him that in two years he was promoted to the ministry of public works, and two years later again to that of justice. In this latter capacity he succeeded in crushing several of the haughty mesne-lords, and dismantling their castles. He even went so far as to arrest and order the execution of a rich and dangerous intriguer. At the age of 52 he accompanied his master in the capacity of prime minister to a spot near the borders of the two states, and took part in an interview between his own ruler and the one who had given him hospitality for so many years. On this occasion he succeeded in defeating the insidious diplomacy of the rival state, and in forcing the surrender of disputed territory. But, though Confucius considered that a

display of force should accompany diplomatic action, he took the general view that good example was more efficacious * than might. Honesty, morality, and funeral etiquette advanced with such strides under the premiership of Confucius that neighbouring states began to grow uneasy. It was first thought advisable to conciliate the rising power by a cession of territory ; but wiler counsels prevailed, and a successful effort was made to corrupt the new duke's heart with presents of beautiful singing girls and fine horses. This moral collapse so distressed the philosopher that he left the country.

Now commences the period of Confucius' travels through the various feudal states, which covered a period of thirteen years. He and his disciples met with various adventures. On several occasions they were menaced by suspicious or hostile bands. On one occasion Confucius incurred the censure of a disciple by accepting (although he tried to escape

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it) an invitation to pay his respects to a divorced or adulterous duchess. On another he was annoyed at a local duke's relegating him to the second carriage whilst the duchess seated herself along with her husband in the first. One instance is recorded in which he distinctly broke his pledged word ; but he defended himself on the ground that promises extorted by force are not binding. This saying was advanced by Chinese statesmen 17 years ago as an excuse and a precedent for repudiating the treaty made by a Chinese envoy with Russia.

Time, however, will not permit of our dwelling further upon this period of wanderings : suffice it to say that the philosopher had as many rebuffs as he had successes, and that most of the rulers, whilst willing to listen to his counsels, seemed to consider that they possessed more of an academic than a practical value. At the age of 66

Confucius heard of the death of his wife, and that his son continued weeping for her notwithstanding the lapse of the regulation period of one year. He took the view that, so long as the father was alive, crying more than twelve months for a mother was excessive. This fact, coupled with the circumstance that Confucius' grandson divorced his wife, and would not permit her son to mourn, has given rise to suspicions, owing to certain references to an ancestor made by the grandson, that Confucius must have divorced his wife. The learning upon this point is very intricate, but the best opinion appears to be that the ancestor referred to was not Confucius but Confucius' father, who had divorced, not the young girl, but the lady who gave him nine daughters ; and that the philosopher was thus, not only the offspring of a strictly legal union, but true to his wife until her death.

When Confucius was 68 years of age, his own duke, son of the man who had sacrificed his reputation to horses and singing girls, sent a messenger with presents to invite the philosopher back. He went ; but he neither asked for nor was offered any official post. He spent his time in composing the history of his own state, beginning with the year B.C. 722, and thus extending over about 250 years. Confucius desired posterity to judge him by this work, which, though not equal to Sz-ma Ts'ien's Book of History, published three centuries later, was in its human interest far ahead of the dry records of the then past. All Chinese history previous to this date is as vague and unsatisfactory as our own European history previous to the founding of Rome in B.C. 753. The Twelve Tables, which are the foundation of Roman jurisprudence and administrative civilisation, date from 20 years after Confucius' death ; during the half century following the death of Confucius and the publication of the Twelve Tables, Herodotus went upon his travels and wrote his history. So far as my own humble researches go, I incline to compare Confucius in some respects with Herodotus, and to place exact Chinese history on a level in point of antiquity

with that of Greece and Rome, and no more. Previous to the eighth century before Christ, we have skeleton annals, lists of kings, accounts of floods, and narratives of wars in the Chinese world, just as we have in the Babylonian or Egyptian world ; with this important difference that, whereas in China there are no antiquities to speak of which corroborate tradition, in Egypt and Mesopotamia we have innumerable remains in the

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shape of buildings, mummies, and documentary evidences. Confucius attached no credence to the very ancient traditions. He used, indeed, to speak of the Emperors Yao and Shun, who lived 2,000 years before his time ; and, as we shall see, there are antiquities of that date in his temple. Then came three hereditary dynasties which lasted 1,100 years: then the imperial dynasty of which his ducal master was a scion. But, though there is no reason to question the existence of these ancient dynasties, the whole of the information amounts to very little of a practical kind.

Confucius spent the few remaining years of his life in collecting the old songs and traditions, the best specimens of which he has transmitted to us ; in fixing the principles of music, and in establishing forms, ceremonies, and etiquette. His son died four years before him, and this son's relict committed the crime of marrying again. The grandson, then 17 years of age, was carefully educated by Confucius himself, and subsequently published a system of ethics called the " Doctrine of the Mean," or Moderate, which embodies his grandfather's teachings. Confucius' declining years had already been cheered by a promise from his grandson to this effect. This grandson seems to have been a man of strong, touchy, and obstinate character ; in fact, an unpolished counterpart of Confucius himself.

One day in his 73rd year Confucius felt exhausted, and had a presentiment that death was near. His last words

were the expression of regret that no intelligent rulers existed who could appreciate and utilise his services. He died a week later, and was buried just outside the ducal capital, on the River Sz, the beauty of which river had for generations been sung in the Book of Odes or Songs transmitted by him to us.

The first regular and general history of China, written by Sz-ma Ts'ien 2,000 years ago, and which in the original forms the basis of my present sketch, gives a list of Confucius' descendants down to the time when the book was completed. The great-grandson above mentioned who was not allowed to mourn for his mother died at the age of 47 ; his son died at 45 ; his son at 46 ; his son at 51 ; his son, a minister of state under the Wei kings, at 57; his son, the man "who hid the books in the wall when a tyrant attempted to destroy Chinese literature, at 57. There seems to be a slight break now, for we are told that the last named had as successor a nephew almost as tall as Confucius ; this nephew, and also his son, died at 57. The son of this last was the father of K'ung An-kwoh, the man who found and deciphered the concealed books in B.C. 150, or, as the old contemporary historian says, "under his present Majesty; and died young, leaving a son and a grandson."

We must go to other histories for facts concerning later descendants : confusion is sometimes caused by the use of such a term as 28th descendant, without specifying whether it means inclusive or exclusive of Confucius and the subject. Several served Turkish and Tartar dynasties. The 45th went as ambassador to the Kitai Tartars or Cathayans. It was the 47th who first bore a temporal or ducal title. The present duke, the 76th in descent, has just officially written to thank the Emperor for restoring to him 2,200 acres of land in Kiang Su province, granted to the family 500 years ago by Kublai Khan. It is said that one of the southern branch

is about to start a daily newspaper at Hangchow, the Kinsai of Marco Polo.

The reader has now before him an outline of Confucius' life. Whilst admitting that he was a very worthy man, one fails to discover any symptoms of extraordinary genius, or any reason for the unlimited admiration in which the Chinese hold him. In his Miscellaneous Conversations, a book compiled by disciples, and in those later parts of the royal Record of Rites emanating from Confucius and his disciples, we get more precise ideas touching his character. He was a moderate eater, but very particular and nice. He was not a teetotaler, but he never got tipsy. When the mysterious forces of nature manifested themselves in the shape of storms or thunder, he considered it his duty to sit up with respect ; but he declined to enlarge upon his reasons for so doing. He always said a kind of grace before his frugal meals by offering an oblation. The oriental custom of pouring out a drop of liquor, or scattering a few grains of food before partaking of it, is still in popular vogue. Confucius' own deportment was in consonance with his teachings. He used, giving them a negative turn, almost the exact words so familiar to all Christians : he said : " What you do not wish / others to do to you, do not to them." Self-control, modesty, forbearance, patience, kindness, orderliness, absence of effusiveness and passion, studiousness, industry, mildness, dutifulness, neighbourliness, fidelity, uprightness, moderation, politeness, ceremoniousness ; these were the qualities which Confucius consistently practised and taught. He laid special stress upon the necessity of cultivating intelligence and alertness. He abominated extremes, and preached the doctrine of the happy mean in everything ; in short, the doctrine of the Peripatetics ; a sort of machine-like smoothness, with no jerks or surprises, either on the side of virtue or on that of vice. Gloomy asceticism and passionate militancy were alike foreign to his taste. He was neither a theologian nor a

metaphysician. He simply saw and understood his countrymen, and went to history for the means of governing them. There was nothing of the fanatic in his composition. If I wished to picture to you in life-like modern form the sort of man Confucius was, I should select an old-fashioned Quaker, such as we used to see up to 30 years ago, with broad back, bulky form ; rubicund, solid features : ponderous gait ; and calm, gentle, peaceful, kind, but not unmanly demeanour. Yet this external or social resemblance is defective if we go below the surface : for Confucius took his liquor ; he despised women except as mothers ; that is, he granted them no such equality as do the Quakers, and he would have nothing to do with flirtations, dances, singing, sky-larking, or it may be presumed those harmless kissing amenities so popular with non-Quakers. Mencius, 200 years later, was the first to qualify him as " holy." But Confucius declined for himself the right to be called a saint, or even a good man. He said : " I am never tired of learning myself, and never weary of teaching others." He did not wish to appear censorious. Though tolerant of old religious or superstitious notions, he did not care to go into questions of future life, extraordinary things, spirits, devils, anarchy, revolution, and mystic doctrines. In the presence of the forces of nature he was, as we have seen, awed but silent ; he declined to

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discuss what he did not understand: he said: "Heaven does not talk, and yet the four seasons come with regularity." Some writers have gone so far as to say that pure Confucianism is no religion at all. Others describe the ancient notions, which Confucius confined himself to criticising and transmitting, as spirit-worship tending towards fetichism. What Confucius really did was to arrange ancient ideas in orderly form, and revivify them with notions of his own, just as the old Jewish teachings received, fresh

inspiration in the form of Christianity. The ancient idea was that there existed a Supreme Power, and that the King or Emperor, as a sort of vicegerent, was the only channel of communication with that power. In this capacity the Son of Heaven was a Mediator for his people. The worship of private families and individuals was confined to the spirits of deceased ancestors. The adorning of graves by the French on All Souls' Day is perhaps a survival of a once more universal custom. "To sacrifice to spirits not belonging to a man," says Confucius, "is mere flattery." It has always appeared to me, in short, that the Chinese regarded and still regard the next world as being a mere repetition of this, each person in this world addressing himself to those of his own rank and kind in the next. Dr. Legge is of opinion, however, that the Lordship of Heaven was, to the Chinese fathers, exactly what the notion of God was to our fathers. Confucius, like everyone else, grew up totally ignorant of any world except that in which he found himself. His prudent attitude has led some European divines to brand him outright as a sceptic, who only veiled his disbelief out of deference for antiquity. But that is going too far. He noticed that the imaginations of his fellow men led them to express belief in much that was not evident to him, so he adopted the safe course of admitting nothing but the possible existence, in a form not quite apparent to him, of sentient beings that had already lived in this world. He did not care much about the constituent elements of emotion or intellect. What is popularly known as "German philosophy" had no charms for him. It cannot even be made out whether he thought man's nature good or evil in its origin. He admits that men are naturally born different, but the effects of such initial differences are as nothing compared with the levelling effects of education and training.

Nor was Confucius inclined to split hairs upon the vexed question of sin, or even to speak of sin except in connection with the practical affairs of life. On one occasion he said

that, setting aside theft and robbery, there were five capital sins, malignancy, perverseness, mendacity, and two others not very clearly defined, but which look like vindictiveness and vacillating weakness. Confucius was a believer in the three ancient forms of divination, and an ardent student of certain mystic diagrams dating from 600 years previous to his own birth. I have never been satisfied that these diagrams had any practical meaning ; or, if they had, that the meaning now given to them by curious students expresses what Confucius really had in his mind. Confucius, in short, consulted the popular oracles, as did the Greeks and the Romans. We may disapprove, but if it was foolish to consult oracles of which he knew nothing, why should it be wiser to make requests to spiritual beings of which he also knew nothing ? The

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government of China still publishes a list of dies fasti and nefasti, and orders prayers to “save the moon” at an eclipse, although its officers are capable of foretelling the eclipse. Probably Confucius fell in with popular views. One thing is quite certain : whatever Confucius believed in a vague way as to the spiritual form which man took after death, he certainly

/ never conceived any such idea as the doctrine of rewards and punishments. His view, concisely expressed, was that “life and death are a matter of destiny : wealth and honours are disposed by Heaven.” In other words, whilst approving individual effort, he counselled patient submission. As he lived 500 years before our era, it is evident that he could not have believed any of our modern dogmas, unless the mystic Lao-tse be accepted as a Christian prophet, which is absurd. To this extent, therefore, it may

be said that Confucius had no religion, and preached no religion. Like the Persians and Chaldeans, the Chinese and

the Tartars had a sort of Sabaeen religion, in which worship was offered to the Sun, Moon, and Stars : at times also to other forces of nature, such as wind, the forests, and the rivers. But these beliefs, as also that in divination, may be popular excrescences which have been superadded at a later date upon the more ancient monotheism. Dr. Legge considers that even now this basis of monotheism is no more destroyed by popular additions than is our own monotheism by the worship of saints by large numbers of Christians. Of all the things which we, as Christians, profess to believe, there are only two things which it was reasonably possible for Confucius to believe. He might have believed in a Maker of Heaven and Earth, in the Resurrection of the Body, and in Life Everlasting; but that scarcely amounts to a religion, as nearly all primitive men have had beliefs of this kind. He probably did, in common with the received traditions, more or less vaguely believe in a Supreme Maker, but he did not attempt to define or dogmatise as to what that Maker was, or how he created. He preferred to discuss the practical character of things before his eyes, and was indifferent to the causes of those things. He says nothing about the future state, but holds / that man continues, after what we call death, to live on. The Chinese idea of death differs from ours : thus, a man may die and come to life again ; that is, may lose consciousness and revive : their ignorance of

- physiology precludes our absolute notion of death. In the same way with

the ghost which takes its departure on death : there is always an idea that it is hovering near the body, and may give trouble at any time if not propitiated. There have been endless discussions amongst missionaries as to why Confucius preferred to speak impersonally of Heaven, avoiding the personal form God, and as to whether he

believed in the efficacy of prayer. In most cases the arguments appear to me somewhat biased by the personal preconceptions of the polemic ; that is to say, he wishes to prove that, if Confucius was good, it was because he believed what the controversialist believes ; if evil, because he failed to believe what the controversialist believes ; and so on. This is, in fact, the course which the rival schools of Chinese philosophy themselves adopt. Where Confucius is silent, they claim that he expressed in general terms the sentiments expanded by themselves. In other words, they dogmatise. Thus Mencius

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insists that man's nature is evil; Mencius that it is good, in its origin. One philosophy pleads for universal love ; another for pure selfishness. As a matter of fact, Confucius steered clear of all positivism ; he said, in fact, that even his "medium policy" was a shifting medium, according to time and circumstances : in short, he was in some respects an opportunist. He objected to commit himself so far as to say the dead were conscious, lest rash sons should waste their substance in sacrifices ; he equally declined to assert that they were unconscious, lest careless sons should not sacrifice at all. At the same time he himself always sacrificed as though the spirits were present.

Some blame Confucius because he was unable to grasp the full nobility of the Taoist maxim : " Return good for evil." Confucius took time to consider, and finally decided that evil should be repaid by justice, and good reserved for the recompense of good. His own countrymen find fault with him for glossing over, in his history, the failings of men of rank, worth, or his own family connection ; and Dr. Legge, the distinguished Oxford professor, shows in detail that this is true. It is not for me to sit in judgment upon the judges ; but I would suggest that, however noble the precept enjoining good for evil may be when cherished in the hearts