THE "NESTORIANS" ONCE MORE *).

BY

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It would have been a discovery of great importance if representations of Nestorian priests dating from the T'ang dynasty had really been found in Chinese literature, and therefore, in order that no stone should remain unturned in order to bring possible evidence to light, I sent a reproduction of the Three in One picture to the learned Nanking priest, Père Peter Hwang, who is probably one of the most profoundly-read men in China at the present moment. His reply is written in Chinese, and I herewith give a translation of it, neither adding to nor omitting anything from the original.

Reply from the Chinese priest.

I have received your letter, asking if the three figures on the ink-slab picture are Confucius, Laotsz, and Buddha, or if they have been borrowed from any literary record of the T'ang dynasty, and I have now to formulate my reply in six paragraphs as follow:—

1. During the Ming dynasty one Ch'êng Kün-fang, a native of Hih *hien* in An Hwei province, manufactured very fine inks, upon which he impressed embossed pictures, which he divided into six categories, — artistic, topical, officials, beautiful objects, Confucian

*) See *Asiatic and Imperial Quarterly Review*, July-number, 1907, pp. 175—6.

maxims, and costumes. During the reign period Wan-lih of Divus Spiritualis (1573—1614) he sent supplies to Court and composed a work on Inks in twelve chapters.

2. At this same time a man from the same *hien* named Fang Yü-lu learnt from Ch'êng Kün-fang the art of making ink, and he also manufactured cakes of it, with pictures transferred upon them, in rivalry with the said Kün-fang. He likewise divided his pictorial representations into six groups, to wit, government seals, national beauties, ancient curiosities, remarkable objects, and two other groups having two names, *i. e.* the *T'ai-mu* or *Fah-pao*, and the *T'ai-hüan*, or *Hung-pao*. He wrote a work on Inks in six chapters.

3. During the reign period Hwang-yu (1049—1053) of the Sung Emperor Divus Benevolens, a Buddhist priest named K'i-sung started the theory that *the three individuals had one aim in view*, meaning that the Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist teachings might be united in one; and he accordingly composed a work in five chapters called (*Mutual*) *Support in Religion*, which is mentioned in the Encyclopedia *Wên-hien T'ung-k'ao*. His views had great vogue amongst the people during the Mougol (1200—1368), and Ming (1368—1644) dynasties, and during the first part of the present one. "Three Faith Chapels" were built, and in them were worshipped the three images of Buddha, Laotsz, and Confucius, all in one hall. Some of the images were cast in copper or iron; others were carved out of scented woods, or moulded out of clay. During the K'ien-lung reign (1736—1795) of our present dynasty, there were 590 Three Faith Chapels in the province of Kiang Si. In the sixth month of the ninth year of that reign (summer of 1744), an imperial decree commanded the viceroys and governors of the various provinces to issue prohibitory orders. During the Tao-kwang reign (1821—1850) there were still three chapels in Shan Si; and in the 7th moon of the 16th year an imperial decree commanded the viceroys and governors of the

various provinces to put a stop to all this, as is mentioned in the *Tung-hwa Luh*.

4. These two personages Ch'êng and Fang, in figuring the three portraits of Buddha, Laotsz, and Confucius upon their inks, did so in allusion to the contemporaneous Three Faiths, and were not drawing upon any literary allusion of the T'ang dynasty.

5. The four words "unite three in one", cut into the back of inkslabs, are a portion of the text which appears in the astronomical chapter of the Han History (B.C. 200—A.D. 20); the whole of it runs: "The original efflatus of the Great Extreme unites three in one", and the word Extreme is here explained to mean "Centre". But in the present allusion to the Three Faiths in One there is no reference whatever to the original sense of the above sentence in the Han History.

6. The three characters "may not rub" carved upon the side of the ink cake are not taken from any literary record, but have a quite commonplace signification, meaning simply that *this ink is specially intended to be kept by, and should not be ground down for use* in writing characters; because, if it were so ground down for ordinary use, then the bodies and heads of the effigies would be injuriously diminished, and by degrees obliterated, which would be an unworthy and irreverent proceeding. The work on Inks by M^r Fang also has ink cakes with Buddhistic effigies alone, that is an encircled image of an old bonze squatting down: at the side of this one also occur the same three characters "may not rub", which in like way mean that respect must be shewn to him.

Further evidence.

Father Hwang, having alluded to two pieces of confirmatory evidence to be found in the *Tung-hwa Luh*, or Decrees of the present Manchu Dynasty, I at once turned to that work, and dis-

covered the two rescripts of 1744 and 1826, which I find I had already marked down ten years ago as important. I give translations below:—

6th month, *kia-yin* cycle-day (1744). The Board of Rites present a report to the effect that the Literary Chancellor for Ho Nan province has represented the existence in that region of a so-called Triple Religion with over 590 chapels containing images, the teacher of everlasting memory occupying a position inferior to those given to Buddha and Laotsz, an unorthodox arrangement calculated grievously to mislead the people, who vie with each other in squandering their substance for no other end than the destruction of proper doctrine: the Chancellor recommends that the Governor of that province be commanded strictly to prohibit such doings; and the Board not only approves this recommendation, but advises that steps be taken gradually to introduce the sacred effigy into all libraries and charitable schools throughout the province; those of Buddha and Laotsz, on the other hand being removed to separate temples, along with the priests attached to Buddhism and Taoism, who must only reside there; and moreover that other provinces be notified to issue like prohibitions. His Majesty agrees to this.

7th month, *jên-wu* cyclic day, being the new moon. Wang Chên-ki represents that in the Shou-yang *hien* city, and in other cities of Shan Si, there are temples of the Triple Religion, and that the most sacred sage of the past, Confucius, is to be found in one and the same temple receiving the same worship as Buddha and Laotsz, a state of affairs contrary to the canons of worship. Let Shên K'i-hien issue circular instructions to all jurisdictions under his rule to have an immediate change made, and if any other provinces have similar joint temples with common worship, let all viceroys and governors concerned take identical steps to bring about a change for the better, in order to exalt the orthodox teaching.

It will be seen that Father Hwang (or more probably his amanuensis, for he is now too old to copy out fair himself) says "Kiang Si" instead of "Ho Nan". This is owing to the ambiguous use of the word *Yü*, taken from an old name *Yü-chang*, a place once north, but later south of the River Yangtsze. Even M. Chavannes, in his masterly translation of Sz-ma Ts'ien's history, in alluding to the great battles of B.C. 500, often says "Kiang Si" instead of "Ho Nan", or possibly even "Hu Peh". *Yü-chang* seems to have been in its oldest sense a mountain near Yün-yang in modern Hu Peh, close to the Ho Nan frontier: later the full name was applied to Kiang Si; but the "Yü province" always means "Ho Nan". It results from all these considerations, not only that Professor Giles' "Nestorians" cannot be proved to be such, but also that there is specific evidence distinctly proving that they are not and cannot possibly be such. Even with regard to the priest K'i-sung, stated to have "invented" the Triple Faith in 1049, there is confirmatory evidence of his existence in the Great Encyclopedia (*P'ei-wên Yün-fu*), where it is stated that "K'i-sung, leading teacher of the Ming Faith during the Sung dynasty, possessed a collection of writings styled the *Sün-tsin Wên-tsil*". It is not clear to what the "Ming Faith" or "Bright Teaching" refers, but as another literary quotation in the same encyclopedia couples it with the *Ta-kioh*, a common Buddhist expression having apparently something to do with the Pratyêka Buddha, and also couples the whole (*Ta-kioh Ming-kiao*) with *Pan-joh Chêng-yüan* or "Prajñâ's true source" as being "harmless beliefs affected by the populace", it is plain that K'i-sung was a teacher of Buddhism in the first instance, whatever later novelties he may have introduced.

It is evident that Professor Giles, when in his *Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* he describes a 16th century picture of Confucius, Laotsz, and Buddha as being a T'ang dynasty

picture of Christ and two Nestorians, has, to use an old expression of his own dating 18 years back, found a huge mare's nest, and has solemnly laid an egg in it.

P. S. Since the above lines were written, the native librarian of the Shanghai Jesuits' Chinese library has discovered and sent to me the accompanying sketch from a Taoist work, published according to Wylie in 1640, called the 神仙通鑑. Here M^r Giles' "Christ and two Nestorians" are plainly described as "Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-tsz".