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LITERARY.

EXTRACT FROM THE QUARTERLY REVIEW.

REVIEW

Of "Translations from the Original Chinese, with Notes."—Canton, Ch. small 4to. printed by order of the Select Committee, 1815.

Sir George Staunton was unquestionably the first who opened to Europeans any of the useful treasures of Chinese literature. His elaborate translation of the Ta-tsing-lee-lee, or fundamental laws and institutions of the Ta-tsing dynasty, made us acquainted with the real practical machinery by which the Chinese government is enabled to keep together, in one bond of union, the multitudinous population of that extensive empire. Before this valuable work appeared, all the world thought, and the Jesuit missionaries encouraged the opinion, that the Chinese had found out the secret of keeping men in order by the application of certain refined maxims of morality to the practical operations of the government,—a secret which had elevated the nation to the acme of political wisdom; so that when M. Pauw asserted that the Chinese were actually governed by the whip and the bamboo, he was held up by the missionaries as an ignorant and prejudiced writer. M. Pauw's statements however were amply verified by the two subsequent embassies of Lord Macartney and Mr. Titsing to the court of Peking. The truth is, that the missionaries suppressed the facts that every day came immediately before their eyes, and published only what they read in Chinese books; they gave the theory of the government, but kept back the practice—the moral sentiments, but not the moral conduct of the people; and they omitted to tell, what they must have known, and what Mr. Morrison very soon discovered, that "there is no nation in the world in which professions and practice are more at variance than in China." They wrote as if the common-place maxims of morality drawn from the ancient writings of Confucius were actually the rule of conduct with the Chinese: in short, as if China was a nation of sages, in which philosophy and science not only flourished among the upper classes, but produced wholesome fruit in the multitude. The corrupt jargon of the schools Boudh and Brahma, rendered more absurd and unintelligible by translation into an obscure and symbolical language, was called history, and philosophy, and science; and the most trifling sayings of the ancients, provided they were old enough, were set down as sublime truths.

The first part of the little volume now before us contains a selection of reports and edicts from the Peking Gazette translated by Mr. Morrison the missionary, of whose literary labours we have already had occasion to speak. The most interesting are those which relate to a rebellion raised by a certain sect (the Tien-lee) with a view of expelling Kia-King, the present emperor, from his throne, headed, it has been supposed, by his own brother, though the knowledge of this part of the transaction is properly suppressed.

It has been the custom of all the emperors of the present Tartar dynasty to pass the summer months at Gehol in Tartary, on account of the heat; or as the Chinese say, to keep open the communication with the country from which they came, in the event of a change of circumstances making it necessary for them to retreat thither. On the 18th October, 1813, as His Imperial Majesty Kia-King was returning from his summer excursion, and about to enter Peking, a party of conspirators broke into the imperial palace, and kept possession of a part of it for three days. On this occasion His Imperial Majesty issued a proclamation, which, as he candidly states, was "to announce a revolution, and to take blame to himself." After observing that he had scarcely mounted the throne when the sect of the Pe-llen (the white water lily—the *nelumbia*) caused a revolt in four provinces, which took eight years in subduing; that another sect, the Tien-lee (heavenly reason, *illuminati*), whom Mr. Morrison makes His Imperial Majesty to call a "banditti of vagabonds," suddenly created disturbances; "but now," he continues, "rebellion has suddenly arisen under my own arm-pit; the calamity has sprung from my own house."

This proclamation, full of hypocritical humility and self-reproach on the part of His Imperial Majesty, was followed by the most barbarous exertions, which lasted a whole year; several hundreds were put to death: some by beheading; others by a slow and lingering process; some were hacked in pieces by a certain number of strokes, and others had their bodies cut, as it is called, into ten thousand pieces. The Emperor then announces that he had been graciously pleased to promote the officer who first discovered the plot; and that of the three officers of the district, who failed to make such discovery, one he exiled to the extreme confines of the empire, and ordered to be kept to hard labor; another he had degraded, and sent to the army to atone for his offence; and the third he had deprived of his office. Some months afterwards seventeen rebels were hacked in pieces at Peking and thirty-five others sentenced by the courts of jus-

tice to transportation; but His Imperial Majesty was graciously pleased, in his great mercy to mitigate the sentence of these last unfortunate people, and to order that they should only be strangled after a certain period of close imprisonment.

It is a privilege, and rather a singular one, in this despotic government, which, however, every officer may claim, to lay his sentiments in writing before the sovereign, whether in the shape of representation, complaint, or even admonition, and these documents are usually made public through the Peking Gazette, together with the Emperor's approval or otherwise.

A spirited representation of this kind, made to the Emperor by one of his magistrates, is published in the Gazette. It states that many innocent persons had been brought to trial, tortured and suffered death, apparently for no other purpose than to evince the zeal of the officiating magistrates. The imperial edict that first announced the insurrection had ascribed the cause and origin of it to a particular sect; and hence every person, it appears, who was known to belong to any other sect than that of Boudh, which may be called the established religion of the country, became obnoxious to the persecution of these over-zealous magistrates. The Christians, being considered as a sect, were grievously persecuted in every part of the empire, and the Christian missionaries driven out of Peking. So abhorrent indeed to the Chinese now appear to be from the Christian religion in particular, that, on seizing a Chinese linguist, who had been despatched from Canton to Peking by the servants of the East India Company, with a letter and present from our Secretary of State to the late Viceroy of Canton, who had been called to the capital, they insisted, in imitation of the Japanese, that he should trample on a cross, to evince his hatred of that sect of which it is considered to be the standard; this the mandid without hesitation, being no Christian, but a disciple of Fo.

The magistrate above mentioned states, that numbers had been unjustly confined, that many were passed from court to court, and put to the torture under pretence of preparation for trial; that they were finally liberated without trial after their health was destroyed, and their property wasted; and that numbers were seduced or tortured into confession by the inferior officers. Indeed the whole document exhibits a melancholy picture of the abuses that exist in the practical administration of the criminal jurisprudence of this supposed humane and virtuous government.

But what can be expected from a nation whose sovereign and high priest (united in the person of His Imperial Majesty) issues through the Peking Gazette, for the information and "respect" of his two hundred million subjects, an edict, of which the following is a translation, and which we give at full length; it being, in our opinion, as obvious an interposition of miraculous power as any of those which have recently taken place in the Peninsula.

Kia-King, 19th year, 1st moon, 15th day (Feb. 4, 1814).

The following imperial edict has been respectfully received. Last year, when the rebels broke open and entered the prohibited gate, there was in the air, obscurely seen, an appearance of the image of the God Kwan-tei on perceiving it, the rebels became alarmed, and fled to hide themselves. Their immediate destruction followed. To day Na-yen-ching (the general commanding the imperial troops) has reported that when the town Hwa was retaken, the rebels during the darkness of the night made a desperate attack; the government troops were playing upon them with spears and arrows, but were unable to produce any real effect; when suddenly, from a temple by the side of the town, a flame rose spontaneously and shone bright as noon. The imperial troops then attacked in two divisions, pressing on the rebels from opposite points, their retreat was cut off, and the entire number of the rebels completely destroyed. After the affair was over, it was found that by the side of the city was a temple dedicated to the image of Kwan-tei. The temple was completely burnt down; but the divine image, and it alone, was preserved, not having been moved or injured in the least possible degree. During the confusion caused by the rebels on this occasion, repeatedly has Kwan-tei manifested himself and afforded protection. I feel the most profound veneration and gratitude. It is ordered that the proper court, with the highest respect and veneration, consult about, and propose, two words to be added to the original inscription of the God. Let the words be presented to me for my approval, and after that be published throughout the empire, to be made use of as a return for the God's protection. Let the temple of the district Hwa be built and adorned; and when finished, let the lieutenant-governor report and request me to write with my own hand an inscription for the front of the temple, to be hung up with due respect above the gate.—Respect this.

We find in this little collection a reply from the Emperor to a memorial, rather in the way of reproof, of a civil officer, in which he has used the liberty to request that His Imperial Majesty would issue his orders that the steward of the household should be examined strictly "what works are going on at the Three-hills and Five-gardens;" and that he use his endeavor "to lessen the expense." At the same time this officer proposes that certain waste lands should be brought under cultivation.

From all that we have seen and heard of this over-grown empire, we are inclined to think that the Tartar dynasty now on the throne is tottering to its base, and we shall not be in the least surprised if, instead of a sprig of the Ta-tsing branch, Lord Amherst should find a withered Chinese cunuch on the throne of Kia-King, with little twinkling eyes and straggling beard, shaking his noddle like a porcelain mandarin on a chimney-piece. But no matter—the splendid presents and the homage will do just as well for the one as for the other. A rebellion or a revolution, an irruption of Tartar hordes, or a change of a Chinese family, produces no alteration of the least national improvement. The old machine of government turns round as usual, and though for a time its wheels may be clogged and its movements somewhat disturbed, it soon regains its usual motion, and rolls on as if no obstruction had happened. If any of our readers should feel surprise, let them look to Spain

and cease to wonder—Spain, that has the advantage of communicating freely with the more enlightened nations of Europe, has profited nothing from her revolution and little from her misfortunes. China has no intercourse with the rest of the world, and knows no language but her own. The first four emperors of the Tartar race were men of great talent for business, extraordinary vigor of intellect and capable of great bodily exertion; Kia-King is a weak man and a sensualist, and he has been unfortunate in the choice of his ministers—perhaps deservedly so; for the first act of his government was to put to death the favorite minister of his deceased father, to banish his family and friends to the wilds of Tartary, and to rob them of their property.

The second part of this little production consists of the translation of a moral tale, called "The Three Dedicated Rooms," by Mr. Davis, a young writer of Canton, and son of Mr. Davis, the Director. We consider this essay highly creditable to this gentleman, who, we believe, has not been more than two years in the country, and auger well of his future attainments in this obscure and intricate language. The argument of the story is simple enough; the merit of it consists chiefly in the lights which it throws on Chinese manners, sentiments & traits of character. There were 2 men in one street, Tang, the miser, who is called a wise man, and Yu, the spendthrift, who is reckoned a foolish man. The wisdom of Tang consisted in adding field after field to his estate, and in determining never to build a house; the folly of Yu, in always building and pulling down, beautifying his pavilions, and planting his gardens. Life, this foolish Chinese would contend, was not worth the having, without three things, a good house, a soft bed and a stout coffin. But though Tang would not build a house for himself, he had no objection to buy, at an under price, those built by others. In process of time Yu got rid of his fortune, and Tang, who for many years had been casting a longing eye on his house, now had it a good bargain; but Yu in selling, stipulated to keep for his own use a small part of the building which rose to three stories, each consisting of a single room; the lowest he "dedicated to men," being that in which he received his friends—in the middle room he read and wrote, and "dedicated it to the ancients"—the highest was "dedicated to heaven," and had only within it a sacred book and a chafing dish for incense.—It seems that in China, if a man on selling his estate, reserve any part, however small, he can at any time redeem the rest; so that a purchase under such reserve is no more than a mortgage. This circumstance was annoying to Tang, the avaricious man, who tried by every possible means to get possession of the "three dedicated rooms;" and thus cut off the privilege of redemption.

In the midst of Yu's poverty, he was visited by a wealthy and benevolent friend, who generously offered to redeem his house and gardens; but the other resolutely declined it, saying, the three rooms would do for him; that he could not live long, and that at his death every brick and tile would go to strangers. The friend, on taking leave, thus addressed him: "At night while I was reposing in the lowest room, I observed a white rat, which suddenly sunk into the floor. Some treasure is no doubt concealed there. On no account part with these three rooms." Yu only laughed at his friend's caution. Yu had a son born to him in his old age, on which occasion his guests poured in upon him in such numbers, that, according to the Chinese expression, "they ate his salt clean, and drank his vinegar dry." He sold his rooms to the purchaser of the other part of the property, and died shortly after leaving the widow and her son in great distress.

The son, however, became a great scholar; and, of course, acquired a Mandarin's cap.—One day as he was travelling towards his mother's house, a young woman presented a petition in the name of her husband, imploring his protection, and offering, with his whole family, to become his slaves. Her father-in-law, she said, was a rich man, and while he lived contrived to keep out of scrapes; but he made many enemies; and at his death his son was persecuted by them, and lost a great part of his property; but that a great misfortune had now befallen him;—he was cast into prison, and none but himself (the Mandarin) could get him out. The young man conceived it to be some trick, but the woman assured him to the contrary. "In the midst of our property," (says she) "is a tall building called 'The three dedicated rooms.' It was originally your lordship's, but was sold. We lived in it for several years without molestation. Lately, however, some one presented an anonymous petition to the courts, saying, that my husband was one of a nest of robbers; and that the three generations, from the grand father to the grandson, were all rogues; that there were now 'twenty pieces of treasure deposited under the three dedicated rooms,' and that when the hoard was taken up, the particulars would be understood. She went on to state, that, in consequence of this information, the magistrates caused a search to be made, that the treasure was found, her husband apprehended and sent to prison, where he underwent the torture to force him to a discovery of his associates." "Nothing," she adds, "can save us but your claiming the money, which must have belonged to your family."—The young Mandarin refused to do this, but promised to enquire of the magistrate into the particulars of the case.

On mentioning the circumstance to his mother, she immediately called to her recollection the story of the white rat, which the young man laughed at; but the magistrate, who had now arrived, thought there was something in it which

would give them a clue to the business, especially when the mother informed him that ten years after her husband's death, his friend had paid her a visit, and enquired, whether, before they sold the "three dedicated rooms," they had discovered any treasure; and that, being answered in the negative, he said it was a fine thing for those who had bought the property, but that undeserving of the wealth they had thus acquired, instead of a blessing it would turn out their greatest misfortune. During this conversation, the old gentleman made his appearance, and the story of the white rat and the treasure was at once unravelled; the treasure was employed in redeeming the property of the deceased Yu; and the son of Tang was released from prison.

"In order to remember these circumstances, every one had a stanza of verses, the object of which was to advise persons of opulence not to be contriving schemes for the acquirement of their neighbors' property. The lines were to this effect:

By want compell'd, he sold his house and land:
Both house and land the purchasers return:
Thus profit ends the course by virtue plann'd,
While envious plotters their misfortunes mourn."

We have only to add, that if Mr. Morrison will continue to make translations from the Peking Gazette, Mr. Davis from their numerous collections of moral tales, and Sir George Staunton employ his superior knowledge on the state of the arts in China, for science we know they have none, we shall soon be able to assign the proper place of this people, who have been much too highly extolled, in the scale of civilized nations. They would be found, we suspect, either immediately above, or next below the Turks.

MRS. RADCLIFFE.

"Of this justly celebrated woman, the principal object seems to have been to raise powerful emotions of surprise, awe, and especially terror, by means and agents apparently supernatural. To effect this, she places her characters, and transports her readers, amid scenes which are calculated strongly to excite the mind, and to predispose it for spectral illusion: Gothic castles, gloomy abbeys, subterraneous passages, the haunts of banditti, the sobbing of the wind, and the howling of the storm, are all employed for this purpose; and in order that these may have their full effect, the principal character in her romances is always a lovely and unprotected female, encompassed with snares, and surrounded by villains. But, that in which the works of Mrs. Radcliffe chiefly differ from those by which they were preceded in, that in the Castle of Otranto and Old English Baron, the machinery is in fact supernatural; whereas the means and agents employed by Mrs. Radcliffe are in reality human, and such as can be, or, at least, are professed to be, explained by natural events. By these means she certainly excites a very powerful interest, as the reader meanwhile experiences the full impression of the wonderful and terrific appearances; but there is one defect which attends this mode of composition, and which seems indeed to be inseparable from it.—As it is the intention of the author, that the mysteries should be afterwards cleared up, they are all mountains in labor; and even when she is successful in explaining the marvellous circumstances which have occurred, we feel disappointed that we should have been so agitated by trifles. But the truth is, they never are properly explained; and the author, in order to raise strong emotions of fear and horror in the body of the work, is tempted to go lengths, to account for which the subsequent explanations seem utterly inadequate. Thus, for example, after all the wonder and dismay and terror and expectation, excited by the mysterious chamber in the castle of Udolpho, how much are we disappointed and disgusted to find that all this pother has been raised by a waxen statue. In short, we may say not only of Mrs. Radcliffe's castles, but of her works in general, that they abound "in passages that lead to nothing."

"In the writings of this author there is a considerable degree of uniformity and mannerism, which is perhaps the case with all the productions of a strong and original genius. Her heroines too nearly resemble each other, or rather they possess hardly any shade of difference.—They have all all blue eyes and auburn hair—the form of each of them has "the airy lightness of a nymph"—they are all fond of watching the setting sun, and catching the purple tints of evening, and the vivid glow or fading splendour of the western horizon. Unfortunately they are all likewise early risers. I say unfortunately, for in every exigency Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines are provided with a pencil and paper, and the sun is never allowed to rise nor set in peace. Like Tiburina in the play, they are "inconsolable to the minut in Ariadne," and in the most distressing circumstances find time to compose sonnets to sun-rise, the bat, a sea-nymph, a lily, or a butterfly."—Dunlop.

LANCASTRIAN SCHOOLS.

The trustees of the Free-School Society of New-York, (of which Dewitt Clinton, Esq. is President) have petitioned the Legislature of that State for an extension of Schools on the Lancastrian plan throughout the State. They mention that they have established two Schools of this kind in the city, in which eight hundred children are taught; that they have succeeded in practically proving its pre-eminent utility; its advantages in point of economy, facility and celerity of instruction; in inculcating order activity and emulation. Anxious to extend this plan to all parts of the State, they offer to instruct persons in the art of teaching the system free of expense, so that every common school in the State may, in this manner, become a Lancastrian School, and thereby greatly multiply the advantages of education, especially to the poorer classes of society.

* We would make an exception however of the Hsiao-chuan, or "Pleasant History," translated by the Bishop of Dromore from a Portuguese manuscript, which is a genuine Chinese Novel, containing a faithful picture of the domestic manners, habits and character of this singular people.