

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

The Victoria Institute,

OR,

Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

VOL. LXIV.



LONDON :

Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W.1.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

1932

751ST ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, JANUARY 18TH, 1932,

AT 4.30 P.M.

DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE, M.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the ACTING HON. SECRETARY announced the following elections. As Members: Miss C. Tindall (from Associate); and the Rev. Prebendary H. W. Hinde; and as Life Associate, the Rev. W. M. Fouts, ThD.

The CHAIRMAN then called on Brig.-General H. Biddulph, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., to read his paper on "The Nestorian Mission to China."

THE NESTORIAN MISSION TO CHINA.

By BRIG.-GENERAL H. BIDDULPH, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

THE early ages of the Christian Church were a time of great missionary activity, but we have little beyond traditions as to the spread of Christianity. Many of the early churches perished, but the largest area in which Christianity was extinguished was the Chinese Empire. I desire to examine this matter and the lesson taught is one of abiding value.

Tradition of doubtful value ascribes to St. Thomas the introduction of Christianity into China, and it is not until A.D. 635 that we come to assured facts. Early in A.D. 1625 workmen dug up near Hsi-an-fu, the capital of Shensi, a large stone slab covered with an inscription in Chinese, interspersed with a few sentences in Syriac, and bearing some 70 names of individuals in Chinese and Syriac.

This discovery was notified to the authorities, and the first translation was made by the Jesuit missionaries. Two of the most recent translations are by Professor Saeki, of Tokyo, and by Mr. A. C. Moule, the former of whom adds a mass of explanatory notes.

The inscription, entitled "The Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Syrian Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom," begins with a summary of the doctrine of God, the Trinity, and of Man. It then records the arrival of A-lo-pen from Syria (perhaps Rabban) with books and images in A.D. 635. The Emperor, T'ai-Tsung, received him honourably, had his books examined, and, approving the doctrine, issued an edict in A.D. 638 in favour of the new religion, authorizing its free course throughout the Empire. A monastery was to be built in Hsi-an-fu with twenty-one regular monks, and the Emperor's portrait was to adorn its walls. The Emperor Kao-Tsung (A.D. 650-683) caused monasteries of the Luminous Religion to be founded in every prefecture, and conferred on A-lo-pen the office of Great Spiritual Lord, Protector of the Empire. The religion spread over the ten provinces, and the Empire enjoyed great prosperity. Monasteries occupied every city, and families enjoyed the great blessings.

Then there followed a period of decline under the attacks of Buddhists and Taoists, but the arrival of a fresh mission from Persia in A.D. 732, under Lo-han, the head priest, and Chi-lieh, effected a revival. The Emperor, Hsuan-Tsung (A.D. 712-755), who was surnamed "the Perfection of the Way," ordered five princes to visit the monasteries and to set up altars therein. In A.D. 742 he directed his Generalissimo of Cavalry to place the portraits of the five emperors in the monastery, and to present a hundred rolls of silk. In A.D. 744 a priest named Chi-ho arrived from Syria to pay court to the Emperor, who gave orders to Lo-han, P'u-lun and others to perform services in the Hsing-ch'ing Palace, and the Emperor himself composed and wrote a motto to be fixed on the door of the monastery. The monastery was resorted to by influential people and enjoyed the Imperial favour.

The Emperor, Su-Tsung (A.D. 756-762), rebuilt the monasteries of the Luminous Religion in Ling-wu and in four other departments; great prosperity came down and the Imperial Estate was established. The Emperor, Tai-Tsung (A.D. 763-779), observed the rule of non-assertion and walked in the Way of the Silent operation. On his birthday he used to bestow celestial incense wherewith to report his meritorious deeds (to Heaven), and distributed provisions from his own table to the congregation of the Luminous Religion. The present Emperor, Te-Tsung (began to reign A.D. 780), also was favourable.

Then follows an eulogy of the Great Patron Issu, a priest who received the purple robe, and who occupied the highest offices of State. Ever since he had heard of the "Way" he practised it. He made magnificent gifts, restored the old monasteries, enlarged and beautified the worship-halls. He spent his income in benevolent deeds and annually assembled the priests of the four monasteries to a retreat of fifty days. He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, healed the sick and buried the dead. Such excellence was not yet heard of, and we see this man among the white-robed scholars of the Luminous Religion. Next follows a poetical eulogy of the Emperors, and finally it is recorded that the monument was erected in A.D. 781 in the days of Mar Hanan-isho, Catholicos, Patriarch. Some seventy names are added in Chinese and Syriac, the individuals ranging from monk to bishop.

Independent Chinese writings refer to statements recorded on the monument, such as A-lo-pen's mission and the decree of A.D. 638, approving his doctrine and its teaching throughout the Empire, and directing also the building of a monastery in Hsi-an-fu, with 21 regular monks. The monk, Chi-lieh, is also mentioned more than once. He came in A.D. 732 in the suite of a high official sent by the King of Persia to do homage to the Emperor. A decree of A.D. 745 states that the Persian religion of the Scriptures originating from Syria, had long been taught and practised in the Middle Kingdom. An inscription of about A.D. 824 refers to Manicheans, Christians and Zoroastrians as being among foreign immigrants into China. Evidence also exists to the effect that the natives built a monastery for a full complement of resident monks about A.D. 875 in the city of Ch'uan-chou-fu, and another record refers to a monastery in the same city, built in the reign of Hsuan-Tsung (A.D. 712-755).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the local priests found near Tuan-Huang a hoard of thousands of ancient MSS. hidden in a rock-hewn chamber. In 1908 both Sir Aurel Stein and Professor Paul Pelliot visited the locality and obtained a fair number of these MSS. Among them are some Christian MSS. detailed by Mr. Moule: (1) A Hymn to the Trinity; (2) Lists of Saints and Religious Works; (3) an historical note, stating that in the ninth year of the Emperor Tai-Tsung, A-lo-pen came to China from the West; (4) Four books which probably date from the eighth century; the only one of the four to which Mr.

Moule has had access is entitled "The Book of Jesus, Messiah," and from its queer mistakes it is considered to be the work of a foreigner.

We know from the monument that before the arrival of Lo-han and Chi-lieh in A.D. 732 the Buddhists and Taoists had attacked the new teaching, and as early as A.D. 797 a reaction against Nestorians and Buddhists began to appear, when for the first time Confucianists were allowed to share in the Imperial birthday services with Buddhists, Taoists and Nestorians. Before long the Taoists and Confucianists stirred up a movement against foreign religions, which culminated in the edict of Wu-Tsung, A.D. 845, and involved both Christians and Buddhists in a common downfall.

The reason of the decree is obvious, and reminds one forcibly of the suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII. It commences by inveighing against the innovation of Buddhism and image-worship which prevailed far and wide. Everywhere the number of priests is increasing and the Buddhist temples winning support. Labour is wasted, the public purse plundered, parents and sovereign ignored, the people are injured, the monasteries and temples vie with the Imperial Palace in magnificence; while manners and customs degenerate through Buddhism. How dare the insignificant teaching of the Western lands compete with ours? We have decided to put an end to such great evils. The 4,600 monasteries supported by the Government shall be confiscated, and 260,500 nuns and priests return to secular life and pay taxes, 40,000 private temples and monasteries shall be confiscated with several tens of millions of acres of fertile land, 150,000 slaves are to be emancipated and become free tax-paying people. Further examination of foreign teachings in the Empire shows that there are more than 3,000 monks, Syrian and Zoroastrian. They also shall return to secular life and cease to interfere with the manners and customs of the Middle Kingdom. More than 100,000 idle, lazy busybodies have been driven away, and numberless beautiful useless temples swept away. Purity of life shall rule our people. Simple, non-assertive rules prevail, and everywhere the people shall bask in the sunshine of our Imperial influence.

The result of the edict was not merely the suppression of the Christian monasteries and churches, but the rapid extinction of Christianity itself, although Wu-Tsung's successor reversed his anti-Buddhist policy. After this date we never read in Chinese

books anything more about the Syrian Church and its members, and from an Arabic book by Abu 'l Faradj, we learn that the author, meeting a monk in the Christian quarter in Baghdad in A.D. 987 who had been sent by the Catholicos seven years before with other clergy to order the affairs of the Church in China, learnt from him that Christianity was just extinct in China, the native Christians had perished in one way or another, the church which they used had been destroyed, and there was only one Christian left in the land. Finding none to whom his ministry could be useful he returned quicker than he went. When one considers the vitality of Christianity as witnessed repeatedly by history, this rapid extinction of a Christian Church which had been planted under the most favourable circumstances, and had flourished for two centuries, is an amazing phenomenon, the more so since the persecution seems to have been aimed at monasteries and ecclesiastical property. We are reminded forcibly of a house built upon the sand. Surely if the house had been built upon the Rock it could not have fallen! Let us see if we can find the reasons of the catastrophe from the records quoted.

If we examine drawings of the monument we see that the figured decoration at the top "supporting" the tablet on which the title is engraved consists of two mythical creatures called "Khumbira," while the title itself is surmounted by a cross, underneath which is the lotus, with the "White" or "Flying Cloud" on either side. Experts inform us that this Khumbira design is thoroughly Buddhistic. It is a Hindoo idea which the Nestorian missionaries adopted. The lotus, of course, is a Buddhist emblem, and the same authorities inform us that the White or Flying Cloud is "the characteristic symbol of Taoists as well as of Mahommedans in China." Saeki remarks that the design was doubtless used to denote that the "Three Religions are One." It is ominous to find Buddhist and Taoist (or Mahommedan emblems) combined so prominently with the Cross in a Christian ecclesiastical inscription. The indications afforded by such "catholicity" are not encouraging, and they are strengthened by an examination of the inscription.

Saeki brings this to light very plainly. Thus the inscription says of God that He is the "Lord of the Universe," "Our A-lo-he." "The Lord of the Universe," writes Saeki, or "Highly Honoured by the Universe," is an epithet of Buddha, here used in a Christian sense. A-lo-he is the transcription

of the Syriac for "God," and Saeki notes that the three Chinese characters used are the same as those which a Buddhist translator used to represent "the fruit of Buddha," and Mr. Moule also notes this. The inscription further states that God, "setting in motion the primordial spirit (wind), produced the two principles." Dualism is plainly referred to here, and Saeki remarks, "the Spirit of Darkness and the Spirit of Light are indicated by the expression which is borrowed from Chinese cosmogony, especially that of Taoism. . . . Chinese dualism, like that of Persia, explains almost everything by the Two Spirits." One might add that the phrase leads one to suspect Manichee influence. We now transcribe the statement about our Lord: "Whereupon one Person of our Trinity, the Messiah, who is the Luminous Lord of the universe, veiling His true Majesty, appeared upon earth as a man, angels proclaimed the glad tidings. A virgin gave birth to the Holy One in Syria. A bright star announced the blessed event. Persians saw the splendour and came forth with their tribute. Fulfilling the old law, as it was declared by the twenty-four Sages, He taught how to rule both families and kingdoms according to His own great plan. Establishing His New Teaching of Non-assertion, which operates silently through the Holy Spirit, another Person of the Trinity, He formed in man the capacity for well-doing through the right Faith. Setting up the standard of the eight cardinal virtues, He purged away the dust from human nature and perfected a true character. Widely opening the Three Constant Gates, He brought Life to light and abolished Death. Hanging up the bright sun He swept away the abodes of darkness. All the evil devices of the devil were thereupon defeated and destroyed. He then took an oar in the Vessel of Mercy and ascended to the Palace of Light. Thereby all rational beings were conveyed across the gulf. His mighty work being thus completed He returned at noon to His original position."

One notes that, while many details are given in regard to our Lord's birth, not one word is said about His death, burial and resurrection; in fact, His mediatorial sacrifice and triumphant resurrection are completely ignored; the witness to the Gospel of Christ is hopelessly deficient. As Saeki writes, "the ascension was neither a new nor strange idea to the Chinese, it was the Resurrection of our Lord itself that they could not easily accept, whilst some of the literati were altogether opposed to it." And again, "As for the theological difficulties we should like to

emphasize that the most difficult thing for an intellectual Chinese to believe is the Resurrection of the Lord, which is as great a stumbling-block to them as it was to the men of Athens in the days of the Apostle Paul." It seems certain that, unlike Paul, the Nestorian missionaries accommodated their teaching to local ideas. Accommodation to Buddhism and other religions, fulsome eulogy of the emperors, and palpable satisfaction in material benefits, mark the inscription. Thus "His New Teaching of non-assertion is" (says Saeki), "a phrase adopted from Taoism." The author used a Taoist phrase here as elsewhere, but added his own explanatory words, "which operates silently through the Holy Spirit." Again, "Setting up the standard of the eight cardinal virtues," Saeki says, "we are inclined to believe that the phrase was borrowed from Buddhism." In one of the Garbha Sutras we read of "Eight Precepts." It says: "Eight Precepts are truly what make a Buddha of man," and then follow the Eight Precepts in question. Again, with reference to widely opening the Three Constant Gates, "we think that the author of the inscription here again adopted a Buddhist expression." "Three Gates" must be the literal translation of the Sanskrit words, "Trividha Dvara." Again, "He then took an oar in the Vessel of Mercy." "This expression is decidedly Buddhistic; the Saviour of the faithful is generally represented with a ship on her back owing to the commonly accepted tradition that she saves from ship wreck." The same idea reappears in the poetic eulogy later on in the inscription, where it runs, "We see the living and the dead all sailing in one Ship of Mercy." And it is obvious that the Christian teaching in the inscription has a thick veneer of Buddhism and a tinge of Taoism.

With regard to the fulsome eulogy of the emperors, it will be sufficient to make a typical quotation without comment: "The celestial beauty (of the Emperor's portrait hung on the walls of the monastery) appeared in its variegated colours, and the dazzling splendour illuminated the Luminous portals. The sacred features conferred great blessing and illuminated the Church for evermore, although the solar horns (*i.e.* the august and majestic visages) shine forth with such dazzling brilliance, yet the gracious Imperial faces are so gentle that they may be gazed upon at a distance, less than a foot." "Kao-Tsung . . . rebuilt the edifices for Holy use. Palaces of Peace and Concord stood resplendent far and near; the rays shining from them

filled every part of the Empire. The truths of the Way were made clear to all men. Setting up a new institution, he created the Lord Spiritual (*i.e.* A-lo-pen); and every man enjoyed most blessed peace and joy, whilst the land saw neither pain nor grief. When Hsuan-Tsung commenced his glorious career, with might and main he pursued the Way of Truth. The temple names written by the Emperor shone forth; the tablets of the celestial handwriting reflected gloriously . . . the least and the remotest places attained the highest virtue. . . . When Su-Tsung finally was restored to the throne . . . the sacred Sun sent forth its crystal rays . . . the causes of calamity took flight, never to return; tumults were settled and men's passions subdued. . . . Tai-Tsung's virtues united with the great Plans of the universe. By his unselfish benevolence he helped all mankind. . . . The Empire became so enlightened as though the glory of the Rising Sun and the full Moon were brought together. When our present Emperor ascended the throne . . . his peaceful rule of Enlightenment purified every part of the world . . . his glory penetrates the secrets of men . . . nothing is hid from his observant eye. The whole universe gets life and light because of him."

Such flattery is entirely consonant with the immense satisfaction which the inscription displays at the Imperial favour. The spirit is widely different from His, Who said, My kingdom is not of this world.

Let us next turn to the other documents mentioned. The first is "A Hymn of the Brilliant Teaching to the Three Majesties for obtaining Salvation." It is said to be based on the Eastern Syrian form of the *Gloria in excelsis*, and is certainly more definitely Christian than the inscription. It uses the word "A-lo-he" for God, which, as Saeki has noted, uses the Chinese characters representing "the fruit of Buddha." The Messiah is referred to as "merciful joyful Lamb," "generally and universally accepting pain," "be willing to put away the collected weight of sin of all living," "send down the Raft to grant escape from tossing on the stream of fire," which is, of course, the Buddhist figure of salvation; Kuan-yin, the goddess of mercy, being represented with a boat or raft. No reference is made to our Lord's Crucifixion and Resurrection in this Hymn of the Brilliant Teaching for obtaining Salvation. In the second document A-lo-he is again used for God, the saints are all distinguished by the Buddhist title, "Spiritual King," and among

the religious works is specified "The Book of the Three Moments," a Manichean book, which appears to add further testimony to the broad basis of the Nestorian Church in China.

Finally, turning to the *Book of Jesus Messiah*, "the text begins in the manner of a Buddhist Sutra," and the term for "the Lord" is borrowed from Taoism. Moule adds, "The following is an interesting example of the Buddhist colouring which has been mentioned: 'The Lord first sent all living creatures to worship all the Devas and Buddhas and for Buddha to endure suffering.' This indeed seems to take the place of the First Commandment, and it is followed by the Second (our Fifth) Commandment, with the promise that all who have been dutiful to their parents and supported them without fail shall at the hour of death attain the way of heaven as mansion. The Fourth Commandment enjoins love or doing good to all living beings, the Fifth forbids the taking of life or exhorting others to take life, 'for the life of all living beings is the same as the life of a man.' The Sixth forbids adultery; the Seventh is 'Do not be a thief,' and the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth seem rather vaguely to combine the real Ninth and Tenth." Whatever allowances may be made for the supposition that the writer was a foreigner, no one can doubt the Buddhist colouring of the document, and one is glad to find that in this document (and in this one only so far as I know) is the crucifixion of our Lord mentioned, and that He offered His life as a substitute to be put to death for the living beings of the present world. The document is imperfect and ends abruptly with the crucifixion; but it seems unlikely that there was any reference to the Resurrection, for the tract terminates as follows: ". . . the earth quaked and the hills rocked and all the gates of the graves in the world were opened and all the dead men all received life. When the men saw it like this, though there were yet some who did not believe the teaching of the Scriptures that death and life were both in Messiah, the men in general had belief. Men then said—"

The cumulative effect of this evidence is irresistible, and appears to afford proof that the Nestorian Church in China accommodated its public teaching to suit the religious ideas and prejudices of the people. Essential Christian doctrines, such as the Crucifixion and Resurrection, are blurred or omitted, and Buddhist ideas and phraseology emphasized. It is not without significance that William of Rubruck, who travelled to the Mongol Kakhan in A.D. 1252, records that: "The cross did not have the image of

the Saviour, for the Armenians and Nestorians are ashamed to show the Christ fixed to the Cross."

The Nestorians attempted to avoid "the offence of the cross" of Jesus Christ they built upon the sand and not upon the Rock. As Lord William Gascoyne-Cecil writes in his Introductory Note to Saeki's book, "Apparently the mistake made by the Nestorian preachers was that of being ashamed of their faith, and trying to recommend it merely as a branch of Buddhism. There is always a temptation and always a danger in mission work to soften down the edges of our faith, to represent it as something not so very new, not so very different from what is already known; such a policy may avoid immediate difficulties, but afterwards it tends towards defeat; the Christianity which has conquered has been that which is urged with distinctness even amounting to harshness. It seems as if the compromising nature of Nestorianism was the reason why, when Buddhism fell, it was entangled in that fall and then forgotten."

Is this failure merely a matter of historical interest, or does it contain lessons for the present day? I would say that these mistaken methods of the Nestorians are being viewed with favour even now, and when one reads of a Christian hall in India being used for a public meeting to celebrate the birthday of Mahommed, or of a joint religious service, held in Peking on an Easter Sunday, attended by Christians, Buddhists, Taoists and Lamas, with Christian and Buddhist choirs, with an address by a western Christian, wishing success to the Panchen Lama in fulfilling the mission of Gautama the Buddha, Jesus the Christ, and all holy men, one can scarcely say that the lesson is not needed. It may be said that these are extreme examples, and one may admit it, but the tendency to minimize the basis of Christianity (viz., the Cross of Christ) is only too common. Take that widely praised book on missionary hopes in India, *The Christ of the Indian Road*; let me read a few extracts from a criticism by Nemaï Chunder Das: "In the midst of much that is fine this book contains a good deal of matter that is positively misleading and harmful, and while reading the book a Christian reader feels that there is much pandering to the vanity of the educated Hindu. The fundamental fact that Christ came to save men from their sins is very imperfectly realized and stated, if at all. There is a constant endeavour to let the Hindu interpret Christ in his own way. . . . One looks in vain for a clearer state-

ment of the mission of our Lord on earth. The author practically ignores the more fundamental point, viz., that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life . . . a sinner must first and foremost be saved from his sins by accepting Christ as his Saviour. Yet hardly anything is said on this vital point. . . . As to Hinduism also, it may be said that the foreign reader who has never been to India, is certain to receive a wrong impression. . . . The author realizes the fact that India has slipped into pantheism—everything God—but he airily remarks that it will be corrected to a pantheism—everything in God. I am afraid that this happy consummation cannot be brought about by adopting the author's method. . . . Will Hinduism gradually evolve into Christianity, or will it be entirely replaced by the teaching of Christ? . . . The former course of progress will be considered impossible by everyone who knows the bent of the Hindu mind."

Listen, again, to an Indian religious periodical: "Mission colleges employ Hindu professors, who naturally undermine any teaching by a European on religion. . . . Some (European professors) have joined an International Fellowship Movement, in which they undertake not to proselytize, nor can they pray through Jesus Christ at their meetings. At the Cambridge Mission College in Delhi, when I visited it in 1929, they never prayed through Jesus Christ at Morning Prayers for fear of offending Hindus and Mahomedans. . . . God never honoured cowards."

Let us turn now nearer home. With regard to "The Modern Oxford Movement," the Master of St. Peter's Hall has stated publicly, "The root error of the 'Groups' is that they are founded upon no essentially Christian basis. . . . According to their practices, communion between God and man is not mediated through our Lord Jesus Christ alone, and He has to be dragged in as a Patron, or as an example only of what our communion with God might be. . . . Their theology seems to be a leap from surrender to God the Father to communion with God the Holy Ghost. . . . The Groups have within them the seeds of death."

These examples, picked from different quarters, illustrate the Nestorian Inscription and the criticisms might be criticisms of that Inscription itself. However good the intention may be, it is certain that Christian enterprise which does not place the mediatorial Sacrifice of Christ first and foremost in its teaching

will fail in its object ; and that no better results will attend such methods in the twentieth century than they did in the seventh and eighth.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Dr. Thirtle) said : The subject brought before us this afternoon is one of profound interest, and, moreover, as we have found, it is capable of a very important and profitable interpretation. While experts may be able to read with understanding the considerable literature that has gathered round the story of the Nestorian Mission to China in the seventh and eighth centuries of our era, most of us must be content with particulars such as may be gathered from an encyclopædia ; and, quite obviously, this must mean for the most part a one-sided view of what is avowedly a large subject. At length we are likely to discover that, though information regarding the Nestorian Mission is slight and deficient, what is more serious is that such information is of little use in the larger study of Christian Missions in the Far East.

Thanks to the wide reading of General Biddulph, and the care with which he has digested the results of patient research, we have had brought before us this afternoon a very serviceable appreciation of a great story, and, what is more, a discerning criticism of the true nature of the historic Nestorian Mission in China, with a careful indication of the defects that lay at the base of the movement, defects which account for the deplorable failure of what promised to be a great religious development.

I am sure I carry the meeting with me when I recognize the conscientious manner in which the General has set forth the results of modern investigation in regard to the Nestorian inscription and its interpretation. The work of Professor Saeki has been illuminating in a high degree, and has placed in a well-defined light the suggestions of earlier exponents of the historic monument and the literature that has grown around it. When at length the General went on to point out the essential weakness of the Nestorian Mission—the spirit of accommodation which brought in compromising elements from Buddhism and other forms of faith—he rendered a truly important service. And as we recall, he proceeded to find traces in quite modern movements of factors that are correspondingly weak, and

uttered words of warning to which we do well to take heed. There are, as we know, on all hands, teachers who omit from their statement of the Christian faith facts and doctrines that are of vital importance ; and, on the other hand, there are those who would assign to individual " experience " a place which should rightly be occupied by Divine Revelation, accepted in the mind and appreciated in the heart. In just such circumstances we do well at the present time to bear in mind the great spiritual lesson supplied by the Nestorian Mission and its humiliating record. Methods that brought failure a thousand years ago cannot be expected to yield success to-day.

On these and other accounts, I thank the General most heartily for his paper, at once informing and suggestive, and call for a vote of thanks (which was cordially given) for the lecture delivered in our hearing.

Major WITHERS, R.A., said : The wonderful walk in the Emmaus Road (Luke xxiv) is to the point here. The Lord Jesus (in v. 25) reproves his hearers for their unbelief. But we must notice that they *did* believe the promises to Israel in Messiah ; their failure was that they did not believe ALL, and the word ALL is emphasized to a remarkable extent. So it was with the Nestorians, and so it is now. We will not believe all the Scriptures.

If we try to believe *more* than all, by adding to the Scriptures, we end by believing less. The Nestorians added some Buddhism, and lost everything distinctively Christian. Similarly, if we refuse to believe all, we end by adding something antichristian. I can see no trace, in the Nestorians' teaching, of the Gospel proclaimed by the Apostle Paul to the nations. And so these people lost even the poor fragments of Judaism they held at first.

We learn that, before his death, all in Asia turned away from the Apostle Paul. The pristine purity of doctrine of the early Church is a myth. Even in A.D. 65, apostasy from the true Evangel of the Apostle Paul was in full swing, and we may well wonder whether the missionaries to China had ever received it. The Didaché shows no trace of it either. To-day the Churches are again falling away thus.

If it is necessary to add tradition to the sacred Scriptures in order to support our creeds and customs, so much the worse for the creeds

and customs. The Nestorians preferred the words of man to the Word of God. We will end as they did, unless we choose otherwise.

Mr. GEORGE BREWER said: I think that General Biddulph has proved that the Nestorian Missionaries accommodated the teaching of what truth they may have held to the ideas and customs of the people of China with whom they came in contact. Since the fall of man, Satan's object has been to modify and corrupt the Word of God and the simple worship of Jehovah, as the history of Israel reveals by their frequent lapses into idolatry. We see, moreover, from the experience of the Apostle as recorded in Acts, how slow were believing Jews to break from the Mosaic ritual, which had been done away in Christ, and this doubtless led to the establishment of a separate order of priesthood and a sacerdotal system contrary to the revealed word, which could readily be adjusted to pagan ideas and practices.

Had the "Teachers of the Luminous Religion," as the Nestorian Missionaries were called, adhered to Paul's simple gospel, received from the Lord Himself, "that Christ died according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," and the revelation of Light and Love recorded by the Apostle John in his Gospel and Epistles, the blessed results of such teaching would probably have remained to this day. Missionary effort and enterprise have, I fear, too often been undertaken with a view to Christianize heathen peoples and establish a civilized state of society, instead of making these subservient to, and dependent upon, the salvation of individuals, recognizing that human nature, irrespective of nationality or culture, is in consequence of the fall corrupt and in rebellion against God, and that nothing but the new birth and conversion of the individual by the power of the Holy Spirit can effect any lasting good.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.

Lieut.-Col. L. M. DAVIES wrote:—General Biddulph's paper is most interesting and timely. It has always puzzled me to know why Christianity, which spread north and west, failed to establish itself in the east, with which good communications had existed for centuries. This paper explains why. The Cross—the "Blood Theology" with which we are taunted to-day—is both our reproach and the touchstone of our faith.

With all its failings, Christianity—insisting upon the *Deity* and *Vicarious Death* of our Lord—did make good in Europe, conquering the bitterly hostile and persecuting powers of the west, both Roman and Barbarian. In the east, things seem to have been reversed. There Christianity seems to have been received with favour from the first; but, in order to secure the continuance of this much-prized favour, Christians seem to have temporized with potential opponents, bringing their Divine Lord down on to a common platform with the human founders of Pagan cults, and hiding completely out of sight the offence of the Cross. We see what followed. Boasting of their temporal prosperity, while betraying their sacred faith, the ancient Chinese church completed the picture of Laodicea (Rev. iii, 14–18), and was finally rejected as worthless.

The same tendency to temporize is seen to-day. I have known a military officer, at one of a series of addresses given to mixed audiences of Indians in Simla, tell his hearers that he and fellow-Modernists did not wish to proselytize them, but only to make them “better Mohammedans, better Sikhs, and better Hindus.” Yet his address was entitled, “Why I am a Christian”; and when asked what made him think he was one, he kept discreetly silent. History is clearly repeating itself, and it would be well for all who have to do with our modern temporizers to study the fate of their early prototypes.

LECTURER'S REPLY.

I beg to thank all present for the appreciative reception given to my paper, and I have little to add to the discussion. I trust that the lesson for the present day which has been brought out, and the wise comments by the Chairman, may be taken to heart by some at least who are in danger of falling into the errors of the Nestorian Mission to China.