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SAEKI'S 'NESTORIAN MONUMENT IN CHINA'

The Nestorian Monument in China. By B. Y. SAEKI, Professor at the Waseda University, Tokyo. London: SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE. 1916. pp. xii. 342.

A MONUMENT, which may fairly be said to rank in importance with the Rosetta Stone and the Rock of Behistun, stands to-day in one of China's deserted capitals the sole tangible evidence that a thousand years ago there were some millions of Christian believers living in the Middle Kingdom. This is the Nestorian inscription of Hsian-Fu, erected in 781 by a grateful Bishop to declare the nature of the faith and testify to its protection by one of the T'ang Emperors of China. It seems to have disappeared in the persecution of the creed which followed within a century of its erection, and was not unearthed until 1625, when certain Jesuit missionaries published the news of its discovery to the world, to be so completely discredited by Protestants and unbelievers in Europe that the monument was not submitted seriously to study until two generations ago. Replicas of the stone exist now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and at Koya San, in Japan, while numerous rubbings have been distributed broadcast. Yet, while its contents are thus secured to scholarship for ever, it is rather curious that no seat of learning in America except Yale should thus far have thought it worth while to possess itself of a full-sized cast of China's one unchallenged monumental contribution to history.

Professor Saeki's purpose in adding to the literature on this subject seems to be two-fold: to account for the extraordinary disappearance of a numerous body of Christians from China after the ninth century, and to show that Nestorians brought to that country the conception of a personal God and of salvation through faith in Him, thus contributing to the creation of what 'is known to-day as Chinese Buddhism, and to confirm the belief in Amitabha'. On the first point he reaches the notable conclusion that after the persecution in 845 most of the Chinese Nestorians

found refuge in becoming Moslems, while after the Mongul irruption all Christians remaining in Central Asia—between Iran and China—were swallowed up in the conversion of the Tartars to Islam; that the greater number of Moslems (reckoned at twenty millions) in China to-day are descended not from original converts to Islam but from Nestorian Christians; that the issue of those who were not thus perverted are to be discovered to-day in the secret society called *Chin-tan Chiao*, 'Pill of Immortality Sect', still widely spread and powerful in the northern Chinese provinces and Manchuria. Professor Saeki identifies the founder of this sect, Lü Yen, with the scholarly calligrapher of the Nestorian monument, whose name appears upon the stone. The evidence adduced for these conclusions is ingenious, and it is by no means impossible to account thus for the survival of the more faithful adherents of a creed that was done to death officially in the ninth century. But no positive testimony appears thus far to support a theory that without further proofs drawn from contemporary T'ang literature is not likely to convince historical scholars.

The author's second postulate involves him in the fascinating but illusive problem of the source of the atonement and salvation doctrines common to Mahayana Buddhism and Christianity. The streams that transformed Hellenism, Judaism, and Hinayana Buddhism alike all seem to flow from the region of ancient Bactria, but what connexion they had with each other is a question still unanswered. Professor Saeki cannot be said to have proved his contention that the Vairochana sect and Nestorianism in China held practically the same tenets—at least in the minds of the Chinese of the T'ang period—but his scholarship and acquaintance with the literature of *Shin-Shu*, the Japanese 'True Religion Sect', throw new light upon the matter. His discussion of every issue dependent upon the monument is sufficient in its erudition to win the approval of Professor Sayce in a complimentary preface; it fills half of the volume, the rest of which comprises a new translation of the inscription, notes and *pièces justificatives* in Chinese. The book is distinctly worth having, and might be called one of the most valuable among many contributions to the broader study of Christianity issued by the well-known Society, which assumes the cost and risk of publication.

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