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CHINA: ITS STATE AND PROSPECTS,

WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL:

CONTAINING
ALLUSIONS TO THE ANTIQUITY, EXTENT, POPULATION, CIVILIZATION, LITERATURE
AND RELIGION OF THE CHINESE.

BY W. H. MEDHURST,
OF THE LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY.
FIFTH THOUSAND.



*THIS WORK WAS PRINTED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
ATTENDED BY A. MATHAY, PROP.*

Illustrated with Engravings on Wood,
BY G. BAXTER.

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1842.



W. H. MEDHURST in conversation with CHOO-THEE-LANG,
attended by a Malay Boy.

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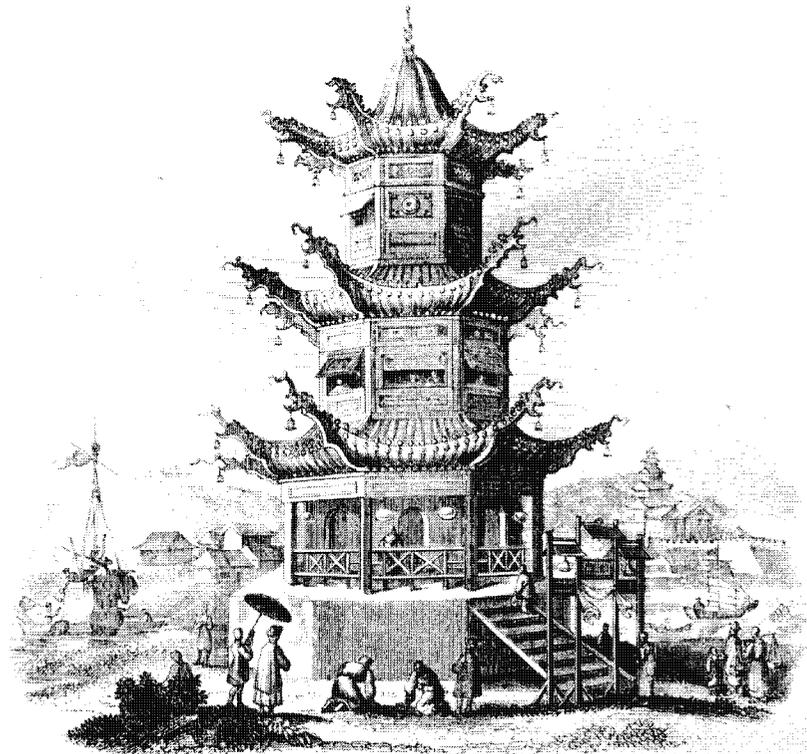
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INTRODUCTION.

THE writer of the present volume was sent out by the London Missionary Society, in 1816, to labour for the benefit of China.

The *fundamental principle* of this Institution is, that “its design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of church order or government, about which there may be a difference of opinion among serious Christians, but the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, to the heathen; leaving it to the minds of the persons whom God may call into the fellowship of his Son from among them, to assume for themselves such form of church government, as to them shall appear most agreeable to the word of God.”

In conformity with this principle, no question was ever asked, or direction given to the author as to his personal views of church government, or what form of ecclesiastical polity he should adopt, in the event of his labours being successful abroad. After residing at Malacca and Penang for several years, he settled in Batavia, where he collected a congregation, and built

a chapel for the worship of Almighty God. In conducting the services of the sanctuary, he invited and obtained the assistance of Gospel ministers from various communions; and when a church was formed, the members who joined it drew up and signed a constitution, in which, after stating their belief in the Inspired Oracles as the only sure ground of faith and practice, they acknowledged the standards of the English, Scotch, and Dutch Reformed Churches, as exhibiting those views of Christian doctrine, which they considered the most in accordance with the revealed will of God. Based on this broad principle, the society of Christians thus collected together, though originally of different communions, consented to lay aside their denominational prejudices, and unite on the safe ground of our common Christianity; while Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Independent ministers alternated with each other in the performance of religious services, and the celebration of the holy sacraments. The native church connected with the mission has been established on the same principle.

Should the author and his esteemed coadjutors ever succeed in introducing Christianity extensively into China, they purpose spending their utmost energies in spreading the simple Gospel through that important empire, without wasting themselves in dissensions on non-essential points, which have so long and unhappily divided the Christian world. It is on this ground alone that they can confidently look for the blessing

of the great head of the church, and claim the countenance and co-operation of Christians of every name. So great is the work, and so feeble the energies that can be brought to bear on it, that we have no time "to fall out by the way;" and it is a pleasing feature of the Protestant mission to China, that hitherto the agents of various societies, the members of different communions, and the representatives of distant hemispheres, have consented to merge their national and denominational prejudices, and to join heart and hand in making known the great doctrine of justification by faith, to the sceptical and superstitious Chinese. May brotherly love continue; and may one strenuous and persevering effort be made, till the millions of China be brought under the influence of Christianity!

But it is necessary that the author should give some account of the origin and nature of the following work. Having been called upon, in the year 1835, to undertake a journey along the north-east coast of China, in order to ascertain whether or not that country was open to the Gospel; and having kept a record of passing events, he contemplated, on his return, the publication of a journal, with some brief remarks on the situation of foreigners in Canton, and the state of the native Christian community there. In the course of his tour through England, however, to plead the cause of missions, he found it necessary to dilate more at large on the political, moral, and spiritual condition of the Chinese, and to relate in order the efforts that

have been made for their evangelization. These statements having been listened to with some interest, and awakened a sympathy on behalf of China, the thought suggested itself that, possibly, the feeling thus created might be extended and perpetuated by a publication, embracing the general state of CHINA, and its STATE and PROSPECTS, with especial reference to the DIFFUSION of the GOSPEL.

The most important feature in the condition of that country is its population; about which so many different opinions have been held, and for the benefit of which Christian missionaries so ardently long and labour. The question of amount, therefore, is discussed, and the suggestion thrown out, that probably the highest census given of the Chinese people is the right one. Their civilization and political state next demand attention; and some references are made to their singular language and the state of education among them. As we contemplate the introduction of a new religion into the country, it is natural to enquire, what are their present views of divine and eternal things, and to shew the defects of their own systems as a prelude to the recommendation of another. Before treating on the recent efforts of Protestants to evangelize China, it was thought necessary to allude to the previous exertions of other missionaries; and therefore the devoted, self-denying, and persevering labours of Syrian, Nestorian, and Catholic Christians are briefly enumerated. The missions to Canton, the Straits, and Batavia, are then severally

described; and the attempts to carry the Gospel by means of Scriptures and tracts along the coast of China are delineated. This review is concluded by appeals for more agents and increased facilities for the vigorous prosecution of the work, as it is only when we use the appointed means that we can consistently look for the Divine blessing on our labours.

The short time that could be spared for preparing this work for publication must necessarily have occasioned many defects in point of style and arrangement. Sent forth when very young on this important mission, occupied during his whole stay abroad in studying foreign and difficult languages, and accustomed to write and speak for the benefit of Mahomedans and heathens, it can hardly be expected that the author should be skilled in European composition. Public engagements, for the first year after his return to England, called him incessantly from home; and it was only during the retirement of the last winter that he has had the least opportunity for arranging his thoughts on the subject now discussed. Being about to quit his native country during the present summer, to revisit the scene of his former labours, it was necessary that he should begin to print almost as soon as he began to write, in order to have the book published before his departure. He must cast himself, therefore, on the indulgence of the public, hoping that the circumstances under which the information contained in this volume has been collected and communicated, will