

佛 國 記



RECORD

OF THE

BUDDHISTIC KINGDOMS:

Translated from the Chinese

BY

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PREFACE.

The "Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms" is a meagre narrative of one of the most extraordinary journeys ever undertaken and brought to a successful issue. A Buddhist priest, named Fa Hsien, travels from China through India to Ceylon, on to Sumatra and back to China by sea; his object being to obtain copies of the Sacred Books of Buddhism for the further enlightenment of his fellow countrymen at home.

This work was translated into French by Rémusat, but he did not live to superintend its publication. He had, in fact, only revised about one half, that half being accompanied by valuable and exhaustive notes. In this state it fell—we were almost saying, among thieves—into the hands of Klaproth, who, with the slender assistance of Landresse and his own very considerable *aplomb*, managed to fill up the blanks of the latter portion, add some bulky notes after the manner, but lacking the scholarship, of Rémusat, and generally patch up the whole in a form presentable to the public. This was subsequently translated into English by a Mr. Laidlay.

In 1869 the Rev. S. Beal, Chaplain in Her Majesty's

Fleet, published a new version of the travels of Fa Hsien, in which he corrected some of the mistakes, grammatical and otherwise, which disfigured Remusat's translation; but managed, it has appeared to us, to introduce in the process a very considerable number of his own. Whether this is so or not we shall leave to the discrimination of those of our readers who understand Chinese, and will take the trouble to follow the notes in which we point out Mr. Beal's errors, or seek to justify any renderings of our own which may differ from those adopted by our predecessors. We would submit that the present translation was undertaken solely with a view to get at an exact grammatical analysis of the text. We do not pretend to have elucidated any new points in the great field of Buddhism, or to have succeeded in identifying any of the hitherto unknown or doubtful localities visited or mentioned by Fa Hsien. This would be the province of those who have devoted more time than ourselves to the fascinating study of ancient geography;—not, indeed, that we mean to insinuate that translation is our own particular province, for we would gladly have seen this task in the hands of some such accomplished scholar as Mayers, Edkins, or Eitel. In that case, future students of the "Buddhistic Kingdoms" would have had at their disposal an English version, proof against any criticism that could be brought to bear. As it is, we can only hope that the present translation will be found a much more accurate rendering than that published by Mr. Beal, who in the year 1869 seems to have been quite unqualified for the task he undertook. He certainly corrected a great many of Remusat's blunders, speaking somewhat unctuously of the "looseness" of the French version, but we

could not dismiss from our minds the unpleasant suspicion that Mr. Beal had drawn upon the valuable notes to that despised volume to a greater extent than he was frank enough to acknowledge. We shall avoid this imputation by invariably quoting the sources of information given; and whenever we have occasion to raise a question as to the proper way of translating any passage, we shall try to put the arguments for and against both views before the reader in as impartial a manner as possible. Our object will be to express the real meaning of the text in the most simple language, unadorned with tawdry flowers of composition: in fact, rather partaking of the rugged, unpolished style of the original. We shall welcome any strictures, however severe, that may lead us to a better appreciation of this difficult author. We have not spared the feelings of Mr. Beal, and we court no quarter ourselves. For there is nothing disgraceful in misunderstanding a sentence of Chinese; it need not brand anyone with infamy or overwhelm him with shame. In support of which dangerous theory and for the encouragement of all erring students of Chinese, we will now relate how a very extraordinary blunder was once made by a celebrated sinologue, and escaped the eagle eye of criticism for many years, during which period the author of its existence rose to power and fame, and is now Her Majesty's Minister at the Court of Peking.

In the *Hsin Ching Lu*, published in 1859 by Sir Thomas Wade, a translation is given of the first chapter of the well-known Sacred Edict. Paragraph 37, on page 50, contains Sir Thomas Wade's rendering of a Chinese proverb quoted in the original text. For the benefit of those who have not a copy of this work at hand we will give the

passage in Chinese, accompanied by Sir Thomas Wade's version and what is unquestionably the correct one; so as to shew the slippery nature of the Chinese language even in the hands of an acknowledged master of it, at that date of fifteen years' standing among the ranks of sinologists.

TEXT.

Sir Thomas Wade's Translation:—"And again a proverb says with equal truth, It may be well to kill another; it is perdition to kill oneself."

了他好又
是人殺設
自壞了得
已殺是好

The correct translation:—"And again a proverb well says, Good as those may be, they are strangers; bad as these may be, they are (part of) oneself."

The allusion is to quarrelling brothers who seem disposed to make friends among outsiders rather than of each other, and the proverb signifies in plain English that "A bad brother is better than a good stranger." The catch lies in the word 殺 which besides meaning "to slay" is often used as an intensive of a preceding adjective, e.g., 好殺—good beyond all expression. But there is yet further consolation in store for the timorous. Dr. Williams in his new dictionary, published after forty years' study of Chinese, quotes the above proverb under the character 殺 with the following eccentric mistranslation:—"If you love the child greatly, yet he is another's: "if you feel that he is a ruined child, still he is my own." Dr. Williams further makes the mistake of reading 好 in the 去聲, whereby he quite destroys the very clear antithesis between 好 and 壞.

We need only add that Fa Hsien's Record contains

many much more obscure passages than the trifling proverb given above. The difficulty of correctly interpreting the written language of China has long been a household word; and where even the strongest fall, the weak need not be ashamed to slip.

ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION.¹

The "Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms," in one volume, was composed by Sung Shih, otherwise called Fa Hsien. Tu Yu² in his *T'ung Tien* quotes this work, but makes the author Fa Ming. He did so because the word Hsien had been appropriated by the emperor Chung Tsung,³ and men of the T'ang dynasty had substituted Ming. For this reason there occur in the original commentary the four words "changed because imperially appropriated."

Fa Hsien returned during the I Hsi period⁴ of the Chin dynasty, having started from Ch'ang-ngan and travelled

¹ This has never to our knowledge been translated before; neither have the two *Notes* by native scholars which follow Chapter XL. See Appendix.

² Here 杜佑. Mr. Mayers, in his *Chinese Reader's Manual*, gives 杜祐, who is evidently the same individual. "9th century A.D. A scholar of profound erudition." His great work, the 通典, is classed by Mr. Wylie in his *Notes on Chinese Literature* among "Treatises on the Constitution." It was in 200 books, divided into 8 sections on Political Economy, Music, Geography, etc.

³ A.D. 648.

⁴ The style I Hsi began A.D. 405. Fa Hsien got back to China in the twelfth year or A.D. 417.