

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

### A Chinese Record of Virtue

Most readers of the December "Century" were interested in an article entitled "The Record of Virtue; an experiment in moral chemistry." It describes the efforts of humane persons to counteract the debasing effects of reading the records of crime in our daily newspapers and sensational novels, by inducing a class of boys, who are naturally led away by such stories of criminal adventure, to hunt up and record in their own language special instances of goodness, kindness, and real heroism. The novelty of the scheme consisted wholly in the means adopted for turning the boys attention to acts worthy of emulation and for requiring such mental effort on their part, in order to make a record of the acts observed, as would leave a lasting impression on their minds.

Our systems of public school readers and our Sunday School Libraries are all gotten up on the theory that the best way to inculcate principles of temperance, morality and religion, is to put in readable form real or fictitious instances of right action, and trust to the story's making its own impression on the plastic mind of the juvenile reader.

This is by no means a new idea – Ages before McGuffey's Eclectic Readers were compiled, the Chinese taught children the elements of virtue by means of illustrated storybooks. A few years ago an American missionary at Peking sent the writer one of these books. The beginning of the book is at what we should call the end, and the end is the beginning, and one goes forward by reading backwards. It is a little foreign to the habits of well-regulated readers of this country, but it can be done. Anyone who doubts its possibility has only to watch a young lady read a novel, to have his doubts removed.

And virtue learned in this way is probably as virtuous as virtue learned in, what we should call a more straightforward way – after a few pages of introduction we come upon 24 full-page cartoons illustrating acts of devotion and heroism, each accompanied by a page of letter-press description. We shall not attempt a literal translation of these stories, but, like the bad boys described in the Century article, I will briefly summarize the good acts illustrated by the cartoons. It will be perceived that in the matter of virtues as in some other things, "the heathen Chinese is peculiar," but still, the heroism of many of the acts described cannot be gainsaid and is only surpassed by their stupidity. We gather from a few of the cartoons that, a good citizen is expected to pay tribute and respect to the Emperor and the powers that be; but the supreme virtue of a Chinaman is devotion to his parents and grand-parents, for their comfort and well-being he must be willing to sacrifice, not only his wife's relations which the children of this world are sometimes willing to do – , but also his wife and child, all his earthly possessions and even his own life.

On the fifth commandment hangs all their law and prophets, and the cartoons, which may be seen after the reading of the budget, chiefly emphasize this virtue of filial love &

obedience.

1–The good child will cultivate his father's rice–fields assiduously and remain calm and steadfast, even in the presence of “Old Chief,” or any other wild beast.

2–When the father wishes to take an airing, the good son will push his cart even beyond the great Chinese wall and the daughter-in-law will help turn a wheel.

3–The good grandson will gather rice and vegetables and carry them in sacks, on his back, to the door of his grandparents, though it cost him much groaning and perspiration and his clothes become much disordered thereby.

4–When his parents need his attention, for their sake, the good son will leave wife and child and cleave only unto them – the parents – Note: This shows that the Scriptures were not wholly borrowed from the writings of Confucius.

5–If a famine comes upon the land and there are not rats and mice enough to supply his wife and child as well as his parents, the truly virtuous man will dig a grave for his child and bury it. The wife, as appears in a later cartoon may then give suck to the aged parents and thus save her own life and theirs.

6 & 7–The Emperor when in his travels gets the best quarter of venison and the first fruits of Orchard and field.

9 –The dutiful grandson will, as soon as he is able, cut fagots and present them to his grandfather on bended knees – The dutiful father will sit by and see that this virtuous act is duly performed.

10–The dutiful son will cover himself with the skin and horns of a deer, at the risk of being slain by the Imperial huntsman, and mingle with the herds of wild deer and at the proper time seize on one for food –Note: Mr. China it would seem that men do not smell as do the rank Caucasians or that the deer have no sense of smell.

11. When wars break out and the spears and banners of the enemy are seen advancing beyond the hills, the dutiful son takes his parent on his back and carries him to a place of safety –Note: Vergil evidently got his story of Aeneas carrying Anchises from the burning Troy, out of this much older record of virtues.

12–After she has thoroughly cleaned the house, the good daughter will air the paternal bed with a palm leaf fan.

15 When the father becomes aged and loses his teeth, the dutiful son will masticate his food for him and when properly chewed and salivated will take it out of his mouth and put it in his father's mouth. The wife of the dutiful son, not to be outdone in virtue, will bear her breast and give the old man suck. Note Mr. America the old man would probably be turned over to a heartless dentist and be fitted up with a new set of grinders and these

fine examples of filial love would be wanting.

19–The father makes the elder son an example to the younger by strapping on his back something like a miss-fit clothing sign, and covering it with a record of virtues which can be pointed at with the finger. Note: it is much easier to point out virtues in such a table of contents, then it would be to trace them in the young man himself and it saves the older brother the trouble of acquiring them all.

20–If the father is attacked by a tiger and overcome, the dutiful son will at once throw himself on the tiger and choke him until he lets go and is glad to walk off. He must entertain no doubts as to his ability to accomplish this, even though the old man has failed, such weakness is tolerable only in America, where modesty in the youth has been cultivated to excess.

22–If the father wants fish for dinner and the rivers are frozen over, the dutiful son divests himself of his clothes and lies down on the ice, so that the heat of his body may melt a hole in the ice, through which the fish can be caught. Note: To break or cut a hole through the ice, or to melt it by lighting a fire, is a cheap Yankee trick not worthy to be mentioned in connection with this melting example of filial piety.

23–In China, the mosquitoes are often very troublesome – The dutiful son will strip himself & lie down on his father's bed, before the latter is ready to retire and allow the mosquitoes to fill themselves with his blood, so that when the old man comes to bed later, he may sleep in peace and quiet. Note: An American boy would procure a few yards of mosquito bar or make a “smudge” under similar circumstances. The former is much more expensive than blood and the latter would annoy the parental eyes and sense of smell and therefore the American boy would be wanting in a proper sense of filial duty.

There are many other lessons that might be culled from this charming book, but as your hearers will probably be unable to appreciate them at their full value and will find difficulty in retaining the impressions already received, we must conclude our record and hand it in for a prize –

W. C. C. [William C. Cochran]

Written for T. M. Hinkle's budget

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