

CHAPTER V

THE RELIGION OF THE TAIPINGS

PERHAPS the most amazing feature of the rebellion was the apparent aim of the leader, Hung Siu-ch'üan, to set up a Christian kingdom in China. To read Hamberg's volume regarding his visions, written from material furnished by Hung Jin (Hung Jen-kan), later the Kanwang, we are led to think that the whole effort was purely religious and Christian, turned by nothing but imperial persecutions into an anti-dynastic rebellion. Towards the end of the rebellion "Lin Li," an Englishman, A. F. Lindley, who served under the Chungwang, accuses the nations of the West of the blackest treason to their faith in finally taking sides with the government against these Christians. He does not deny imperfections in their religious beliefs and practices, but attributes these practices, not to the fault but to the ignorance of the leaders.¹ The same point of view meets us in Chinese books hostile to the movement. They see nothing in the rebellion but a religious crusade against the Manchu government based on a superstition created from foreign and Christian materials.²

¹ Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-Kwoh, the History of the Ti-Ping Revolution*, 1866.

² Most imperialist accounts are similar to this from *P'ing-ting Yuch-foi Chi-luch*, I, 2a. "Siu-ch'üan, realising that without some superstition it would not be possible to deceive the multitude, borrowed the name of the western religion and wished to adopt and set up him whom that religion honoured as Jesus," etc.

In examining the proportion of Christianity and of Chinese ideas in the new faith, we must remind ourselves that prior to his illness Hung appears never to have heard of the new religion brought to China by the pioneer missionaries, who under great difficulties had carried on their work in Canton and Macao. Or if he had by chance heard of it he certainly could have had no adequate understanding of its teachings. His preparation for the examinations, and the teaching he did in the village schools after his failure, meant familiarity with the Confucian classics. In the absence of other instructors we must assume that he would interpret whatever the new books had to say, if there was any point of doubt or misunderstanding, in the light of the ancient Chinese writings.

We have already learned that in 1836, while attending the examinations at Canton, Hung received a set of tracts, which, we are told, he did not examine for several years.³ The next year his great visions came to him during a protracted illness. Nevertheless, for some unexplained reason, it was not until 1843, and purely by accident, that he studied the tracts and understood the meaning of the trances. Once his attention was directed to the books, however, they impressed him deeply, as we may see from his essays composed in 1845 and 1846. It is not possible for us to follow the development of his thought, because we have his earlier writings only in the form in which they appeared when published at Nanking, included in the pamphlets brought from that place by the *Hermes* in 1853. The earlier compositions were "An Ode of the Hundred Correct Things," "An Essay on the Origin of Virtue for the Awakening of the Age," "Further Exhortations for the Awakening of the Age," "Alter the Corrupt and Turn to the Correct." Three of these, to-

³ See chapter II.

⁴ Hamberg, p. 29.

gether with "An Ode on the Origin of Virtue and the Saving of the World," comprise the "Imperial Declaration of T'haeping."

This "Declaration," embracing the work of Hung himself, supplemented by "The Book of Religious Precepts of the T'haeping Dynasty," "The Trimetrical Classic," "Ode for Youth," "The Book of Celestial Decrees and Declarations of the Divine Will, made during the Heavenly Father's descent upon Earth," and some of the proclamations issued from time to time give us the chief materials in English for the study of the Taiping religion. Much of this material has recently been made available in Chinese through the publication of the *Unofficial History of the Celestial Kingdom of Taiping*.⁵

Hung grasped the great thought of the supremacy of God in the creation and preservation of the world, but it is not quite apparent that he understood that this supreme God stood alone. In one of the proclamations it is stated that "God, the Heavenly Father and Supreme Lord is the only true God; there are no other Gods but God the Heavenly Father and Supreme Lord. God the Heavenly Father is all wise, all powerful and everywhere present. He is in all things Supreme. Every man is created and supported by Him. He only is Supreme." "God, the Heavenly Father and Supreme Lord is the Father of Spirits, the Father of Souls."⁶ If this stood alone we should consider that they were true monotheists, but the following passage from "The Trimetrical Clas-

⁵ *Taiping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi* (published by the Wen Ming Book Co.), Shanghai, 1923. The manuscript was discovered by chance several years ago and is supposed to be the work of a secretary in the movement. It is very valuable.

⁶ Edict from the T'ienwang supposed to have been issued in Yungan in 1851. I have quoted from translation made of the copy brought down from Nanking in the *Hermes*, published in the *N. C. Herald*, May 7, 1853. The translation in the pamphlets differs slightly, chiefly in the choice of words.

sic," which, if not written by Hung himself, at least has his imprimatur, leads us to doubt whether even the leader understood monotheism in the Christian sense. The passage described Hung's ascent to heaven after his first encounter with the king of Hades:

He returned to Heaven
 Where the great God
 Gave him great authority.
 The celestial mother was kind,
 And exceedingly gracious,
 Beautiful and noble in the extreme,
 Far beyond all compare.

The celestial elder brother's wife
 Was virtuous, and very considerate,
 Constantly exhorting the elder brother
 To do things deliberately.

God is pictured in that poem as having a divine consort, and the celestial elder brother, who is Jesus, also has a wife. The monotheistic God of the former quotation has thus come to be a heavenly Father with wife and son and daughter-in-law.⁷ One's impression is that, unskilled as Hung was in the subtleties of Western theology, he has interpreted the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in a tritheistic sense, grasping, however, the idea that the three persons of the Trinity are members of the same family, the other two being subordinate to the Father just as members of a Chinese family are to its head. It is against the usurpation of God's place by false spirits and the images representing them that Hung and his followers did battle. The implication that there were other celestial beings is latent in the idea that God is

⁷ There is a possibility that reference to female divinities may be due to Roman Catholic teachings—if Hung had ever heard of them—or to a misunderstanding of accounts of the virgin birth.

married and Jesus also, for Chinese practice requires the marrying of a person having a certain name into a family of a different name. Heaven must, therefore, have had other families, inferior to God's but sufficiently high to furnish consorts to the supreme divine family.

As regards the scheme of salvation and the work of Jesus in the world, there is a passage in "The Trimetrical Classic" which almost exactly paraphrases the words of John 3:16:

But the great God
Out of pity to mankind,
Sent his first-born son
To come down into the world.

His name is Jesus,
The Lord and Saviour of men,
Who redeems them from sin
By the endurance of extreme misery.

Those who believe will be saved
And ascend up to heaven;
But those who do not believe
Will be the first to be condemned.

If we search through the odes, essays, and proclamations referred to as our sources, we may discover other references of the same kind showing some acquaintance with the Scriptures of the West. But there is little evidence that Hung and his followers comprehended the inner teachings of Christianity. The spiritual virtues of humility, charity, purity of heart, forgiveness, and yearning for fellowship with God and Christ, are wanting altogether or have been transformed into a Confucian interpretation of virtue in terms of right conduct. The vices and evils of the age are attacked and the great virtues

held up as ideals, but the voice that speaks is that of Confucius, not Christ. One looks in vain for any religious consolation for those who are in need.

The chief teachings are that one must believe in God and practice virtue, in particular by obeying the commandments. It is assumed that one can do this through his own efforts. Blessings come to those who stand in awe of Heaven's decrees and practice virtue and uprightness, they wield power in the state and enjoy the favor of Heaven. Filial piety and correct sexual relations—that is, respect for the conjugal rights of others—stand as the chief virtues. Abstention from vice is also enjoined, from lewdness, disobedience to parents, killing or maiming the people,⁸ robbery and theft, witchcraft and sorcery, gambling, opium smoking, wine drinking, and resorting to geomancers or fortune tellers.⁹

Hung's favorite argument is that the ancient Chinese literature and the sacred books of the West taught the same thing, namely, that Shangti, the Supreme God whom the ancients worshipped and for whom the emperors still maintained the sacrifices at the altar of Heaven, was the same God worshipped in the West. This led him to place the Bible and the Classics side by side and use them equally as authorities in his teachings. This in itself was enough to win the hostility of the scholar caste throughout the empire. A quotation from "The Trimetrical Clas-

⁸ He bases this largely on the ground that if you kill others or injure them you will bring hurt to yourself.

"From of old those who have killed others, have afterwards killed themselves;

Who will say that the eyes of Heaven are not opened wide?

From of old those who have saved others have thereby saved themselves

And their souls have been taken up to the Heavenly courts. . . .

Do as you would be done by and you will always be right."

⁹ See "Ode on Correct Conduct and Origin of Virtue for the Saving of the World."

sic'' will best summarise his appeal to the Chinese to follow his faith :

Throughout the whole world,
 There is only one God [Shangti] ;
 The great Lord and Ruler,
 Without a second.
 The Chinese in early ages,
 Were regarded by God ;
 Together with foreign states
 They walked in one way.
 From the time of Pwankoo,
 Down to the three dynasties,
 They honored God,
 As history records.
 T'hang of the Shang dynasty,
 And Wan of the Chow,
 Honored God
 With the intensest feeling.
 The inscription on T'hang's bathing-tub
 Inculcated daily renovation of mind ;
 And God commanded him,
 To assume the government of the empire.
 Wan was very respectful,
 And intelligently served God ;
 So that the people who submitted to him,
 Were two out of every three.
 When Tsin obtained the empire,
 He was infatuated with the genii ;
 And the nation has been deluded by the devil
 For the last two thousand years. . . .

Ming, of the Han dynasty,
 Welcomed the institutions of Buddha,
 And set up temples and monasteries
 To the great injury of the country.
 But Hwuy, of the Sung dynasty,
 Was still more mad and infatuated,

For he changed the name of Shang-te [God]
 Into that of Yuh-hwang [the pearly emperor]
 But the great God
 Is the supreme Lord
 Over all the world,
 The great Father in heaven.
 His name is most honorable,
 To be handed down through distant ages;
 Who was this Hwuy
 That he dared alter it?
 It was meet that this same Hwuy
 Should be taken by the Tartars;
 And together with his son
 Perish in the northern desert.
 From Hwuy, of the Sung dynasty,
 Up to the present day,
 For these seven hundred years,
 Men have sunk deeper and deeper in error.

With the doctrine of God
 They have not been acquainted;
 While the King of Hades
 Has deluded them to the uttermost.

Having earlier in this same poem outlined the Biblical story of the creation and the revelation of God to the Israelites, His compassion and power in the deliverance from Egypt and the Red Sea, His care for them in the wilderness, the promulgation of the Ten Commandments, and finally, when they had wandered from the right way, the sending of His first-born son to deliver them from their evil, Hung now goes on to claim his place in the divine plan, which is that he also has been commissioned to bring knowledge of God into the world, to do the same work for China that Jesus did for the West in bringing the people back to the worship of the great and supreme God whom once they followed.

The great God displays
 Liberality deep as the sea;
 But the devil has injured man,
 In a most outrageous manner.
 God is therefore displeased,
 And has sent his Son
 With orders to come down into the world,
 Having first studied the classics.
 In the Ting-yew year [1837]
 He was received up into Heaven,
 Where the affairs of Heaven
 Were clearly pointed out to him.
 The great God
 Personally instructed him,
 Gave him odes and documents,
 And communicated to him the true doctrine.
 God also gave him a seal,
 And conferred upon him a sword
 Connected with authority
 And majesty irresistible.
 He bade him, together with the elder brother,
 Namely Jesus,
 To drive away impish fiends
 With the coöperation of angels.

The poem goes on from this point to relate how the king of Hades envied him and displayed much malignity, but God instructed His son (Hung) how to subdue him and his "imps," which he eventually did, ascending again to heaven to receive God's further commission to return to the world and carry out his mission, promising to be with him and superintend everything.

We cannot be certain who were the adversaries he met in this first battle. The poem records what appears to be something different from the mere hostile or cynical attitude of members of the family or village, and may possibly refer to some earlier disturbances with rivals, such

as the account of God's descents in 1848 records, possibly an earlier encounter with Hung Ta-ch'üan, or unrecorded struggles with the authorities. If it is tantalizing at this point, the passage nevertheless does throw light on the relation which Hung Siu-ch'üan thought he sustained to God. He gives honor to Jesus as the first-born son of God, but likewise claims an equality as God's second son.¹⁰ Against this complete identification of himself as a full member of God's family there are certain passages where he refuses certain imperial titles, such as *T'i*, which to him can mean nothing but "God" and cannot rightfully be applied to any mortal, and in the same manner will not permit the application to him of the term *sheng*, or holy, on the ground that this title can rightfully be applied only to God, and to the celestial elder brother, Saviour of the World.¹¹

In an earlier chapter we have seen that in the year 1848, owing to struggles between the leaders, two men received special signs of divine favor, when in the third and ninth moons of that year God the Father descended into the world and spoke to the multitudes through Yang, later the king of the East, and Jesus through Hsiao, king of the West. These possessions came several times during the next two years, but Hsiao was killed before Changsha, and Yang alone shared with Hung the honor of speaking for God. As the movement progressed and Hung retired more and more into the depths of the palace, Yang gained the control of the government, which he exercised practically alone until he was killed in the dissensions of 1856. Yang gradually appropriated to himself the titles of Comforter, Holy Ghost, *Ho-nai* teacher, and Re-

¹⁰ In one of the proclamations recorded in Brine, p. 229 (verse 5), he says, "Our uterine Elder Brother is Jesus."

¹¹ Proclamation of the Celestial King, Nov. 30, 1851, in the "Book of Celestial Decrees."

deemer from Disease.¹² This attempt on the part of Yang to identify himself with the Holy Ghost encroached on the place Hung held by reason of his earlier visions and was accompanied by treasonable political actions. But it helps us to understand Hung's position, which was that God as Father, and Jesus as elder brother, had prerogatives on which a younger brother must not encroach, but that he was nevertheless more than mortal man. This identification of himself with the heavenly family did not raise troublesome questions of speculative theology; there is no argument about the possibility of holding such a relationship: he holds it as a matter of faith and conviction.

Here we see the fruit of an unguided Confucian mind working on materials recorded in the Bible, which Hung accepted literally and turned to his own purposes. As he progresses in his thought he finds himself farther and farther away from the teachings of the Protestant Christianity with which he had first come into contact at Canton. He is a prophet and son of God in his own right; he is willing to accept little or no guidance from the teachers of the foreign faith, though he must recognize that they represent the worship of the same God. It is for them to come to him for enlightenment, for he has come direct

¹² The full title of Yang in Chinese was Yang, The Comforter, The Holy Ghost, Ho-nai Teacher, Saviour from Disease, General of the Left Wing of the Main Army. "He [Yang] has applied to himself the terms employed in Gutzlaff's Version of the New Testament for 'the Comforter,' and that used by Morrison to designate the Holy Ghost." (From an anonymous writer "X.Y.Z." in the *N. C. Herald*, quoted in Brine, p. 196.) To the same effect Dr. Bridgman, who was also on the *Susquehanna* expedition to Nanking, 1854, p. 192. Yang was then at the height of his power, when he was having his name inserted in the doxology where the Holy Ghost is praised, and omitting the name of the T'ienwang altogether. It comes at a time when Yang is usurping the powers of government and reproving the T'ienwang; it is one of the things leading eventually to Yang's overthrow.

from the presence of God, and the Holy Ghost incarnate dwells in the court at Nanking.

Such blasphemous claims alienated the foreign representatives who came to Nanking in 1853 and 1854. We shall consider more in detail later the reports they made to their home governments both on the political and the religious sides. Had they been met by a different type of leaders at Nanking, had they not been more or less offended by the religious extravagances and claims, it is not improbable that they would have accorded recognition. The American expedition in 1854 appeared just at the moment when Yang was at the height of his power. Those to whom the American commissioner addressed himself sent in reply, among other things, this bombastic mandate, carrying us back in spirit to the days when the question of embassies to Peking and their status was a burning issue:

If you do indeed respect Heaven and recognise the Sovereign, then our celestial court, viewing all under Heaven as one family and uniting all nations as one body, will most assuredly regard your faithful purpose and permit you year by year to bring tribute and annually come to pay court, so that you may become the ministers and people of the celestial Kingdom, forever bathing yourselves in the gracious streams of the Celestial Dynasty, peacefully residing in your own lands, and living quietly, enjoy great glory. This is the sincere desire of us the great ministers. Quickly ought you to conform to and not oppose this mandatory dispatch.¹³

Is it surprising that he did not accord the recognition which he was authorised to grant the Taiping government in case he found there any hope of an enlightened policy?¹⁴ “Whatever may have been the hopes of the en-

¹³ *35 Cong., 2 Senate Excc. Doc. 22, Part 1, 62 f.*

¹⁴ Foster, *American Diplomacy in the Orient*, p. 211, states that he had this authority.

lightened and civilised nations of the earth in regard to this movement, it is now apparent that they neither profess nor apprehend Christianity, and whatever may be the true judgment to form of their political power, it can no longer be doubted that intercourse cannot be established or maintained on terms of equality."

If we have correctly interpreted his writings, Hung's religious views unfolded themselves to him in a form somewhat as follows: "The missionaries from the West are preaching Shangti (God); the supreme God of the ancient Chinese classics was also Shangti. Confucius might have revealed Him more fully to the nation and thus prevented apostasy, but he failed to do so. In later dynasties the rulers forsook Him altogether, going so far as to change His name. In the West, however, Jesus appeared in due time and became the Saviour, through whose sacrifice the nations of the West retained the worship of Shangti. Therefore, we must accept the Scriptures of the West and our own pre-Confucian accounts of Shangti, interpreting the writings in terms of each other. But China is in a hopeless condition; God must interpose again here as he did in the West, and the visions that came to me in 1837 are his call to me to do here what Jesus did for the whole world. God has revealed to me through these visions that I am the full brother of Jesus, the second son of God. Therefore I am in a position to receive and interpret his messages directly; I am one of the Godhead."

Eventually, after congregations were built up on the basis of Hung's divine pretensions, ambitious men like Yang and Hsiao, claiming to be divine oracles, somewhat limited Hung's sacrosanct standing and led the movement into greater extravagances.

Claiming to be of divine parentage, Hung firmly believed that God would care for him and his enterprise.

From the evidence of the Chungwang he was not shaken in this view until immediately before the capture of Nanking. "Relying sincerely on Heaven, he was unwilling to trust men. Everything whatsoever was from Heaven."¹⁵ The Chungwang begged him several times to leave the spot on which the imperialists were steadily closing in, but the T'ienwang was unwilling to depart. An anecdote is preserved in one of the imperialistic sources, showing the confidence of the T'ienwang in divine protection. The Chungwang had been reciting the difficulties which encompassed them and the great desirability of leaving for some other place, such as Kiangsi. The T'ienwang then said to him: "I received God's holy mandate, the command of the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Elder Brother that I should descend to earth to become the true lord of the nine provinces and ten thousand lands. Wherefore should I fear whether you leave or remain in your office? With iron bands I encircle the rivers and hills. If you do not aid, there are those who will. My celestial soldiers number a million, yea ten million. How will the impish soldiers be able to come [literally, fly] into our midst?"¹⁶

Another recorded incident is said to have taken place in 1858 when a cannon ball pierced the roof and fell at the feet of the T'ienwang during a feast. While the rest of the party blanched with fear he laughed and said to the generals: "I have received Heaven's command and mounted the throne as T'ienwang. What to me are a million demon soldiers or the falling of cannon balls like rain, or even their generals?"¹⁷

These particular articles in his faith prevented the

¹⁵ Chungwang, *Autobiography*, p. 186.

¹⁶ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, II, 11. Cf. *Autobiography*, pp. 37, 62, for similar speeches.

¹⁷ *Hatsuzoku Ran Shi*.

T'ienwang from taking as active a part in the government as he might have done. Not infrequently the plans of the ablest generals were frustrated by his overconfidence in divine power and unwillingness to take the necessary steps to win victories or avoid defeat. On this point the Chungwang thus levels his accusation against him: "The chief gave himself no concern about either the nation or the people, but buried in the recesses of his palace he never left the palace gate. When one proceeded to memorialise him upon internal affairs and to make suggestions pertinent to the preservation of the kingdom he would invariably greet you with assertions about heaven and earth—subjects totally irrelevant to the main argument or point of view."¹⁸

Not only did Hung claim divinity for himself, but his son, Hung Fu-t'ien, was proclaimed as God's grandson. In an edict of 1860¹⁹ we find these remarkable statements: "The Father and Elder Brother have descended upon earth and established the heavenly kingdom, and have taken me and the Junior Lord to regulate affairs pertaining to this world. Father, Son, and Royal Grandson are together Lord of the new heaven and earth. The Saviour and the Junior Lord are sons of the Heavenly Father; also the Great Brother's Christ's son, and my son is Lord. The Father and the Elder Brother, together with me, three persons constitute one, etc." From the curious wording of this edict it might appear that Hung had come to regard his own son as the adopted son of Jesus the Saviour in order that he might maintain the divine succession.

As to the popular religion we discover that the Taipings were careful, wherever they went, to establish their worship under the supervision of the officials. Morning

¹⁸ Chungwang, *Autobiography*, p. 62.

¹⁹ Brine, pp. 226 f.

and evening and at meal time prayers were offered. On the seventh day of the week the people were aroused from their beds to offer midnight prayers, and towards noon a general service was held, together with another of the same kind in the evening.

These services as described by Lindley ("Lin Li"), who was several times an eyewitness, began by chanting the doxology, which in the earlier version was very similar to that used in Protestant churches today. After the religion became more erratic, this was expanded to include ascriptions of praise to the various *wangs*, and, at least from 1853 to 1856, placed the Eastern king, Yang, in the place of the Holy Ghost. It read as follows:

Praise the Supreme Ruler, who is the Holy Heavenly Father,
the one only true God.
Praise the Heavenly Elder Brother, the Saviour of the world,
who laid down his life for men.
Praise the Eastern King, the Holy Divine Breath [Holy Ghost],
who atones for faults and saves men.
Praise the Western King, the rain-teacher, an high-as-heaven
upright man.
Praise the Northern King, the thunder-teacher, an high-as-heaven
benevolent man.
Praise the Southern King, the cloud-teacher, an high-as-heaven
honorable man.
Praise the Assistant King, the lightning-teacher, an high-as-
heaven righteous man.

This was followed by the hymn:

How different are the true doctrines from the doctrines of the
world.
They save the souls of men, and lead to the enjoyment of endless
bliss:
The wise receive them with exultation as the source of their
happiness,

The foolish, when awakened, understand thereby the way to heaven.

Our Heavenly Father, of his great mercy and unbounded goodness,

Spared not his first-born Son, but sent him down into the world
To give his life for the redemption of all our transgressions,
The knowledge of which coupled with repentance saves the souls
of men.²⁰

The hymn was followed by a reading from the Bible, after which their creed was recited. I have not been able to find the text of the creed. The congregation then knelt down and a prayer was read by the leader to be repeated by the throng. Such a prayer, used in a service where the higher *wangs* are present, is given in one of the imperialist accounts of the rebellion, and runs as follows:²¹

Thy humble child, —, together with the other humble worshippers, kneel on the ground to pray to the Father, the Lord above, the supreme God, our own venerable Father,²² and to the heavenly Elder Brother, Christ, our own great Brother. Now, in the — month, — day, at the hour of worship, we have reverently set forth our offerings of tea, fruit and candles and offered our oblation of song, to praise Thy heavenly grace. We beseech the heavenly Father to grant us the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to awaken the rulers and people of all nations in the world, that soon, with repentant hearts, they may together praise God, the heavenly Father, altogether powerful and of infinite peace. Bless thy children; in every battle make them victorious. May all things be as they desire. Grant them clothing and food, freedom from calamity and difficulty. Vouchsafe them constant peace, and may they all enter into glory, among the sons of Heaven forever. In the merit of the Saviour, the true Holy Lord,

²⁰ They are in couplets of six characters each, and may be found in the *Tai-ping T'ien Kuo Yeh Shi*, IV, 19.

²¹ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, II, 2b.

²² The characters used for "Father" are different. Above it is *Fu*, here *Yeh*.

the heavenly elder Brother, he who saves from sin, and of the *Ho Nai* teacher who saves from disease. Finally we beseech the heavenly Father, the supreme Lord, the great God, the sacred intelligence in Heaven, and on earth as in Heaven, grant us the desires of our hearts for which we have prayed.

Tai ping T'ien Kuo, — year, — month, — day.

The prayer was followed by a sermon read from a paper which was afterwards burned reverently. The whole congregation then stood and, to the accompaniment of musical instruments, wished long life to the T'ienwang. This was followed by the reading of the Ten Commandments with the annotations to each. The commandments were very short, quoting the substance of each of the Biblical commandments without the modifying clauses that are given in the Bible. After these had been read the accompanying hymn was chanted and firecrackers and incense were burned.²³

The Ten Commandments as interpreted by the Taipings formed so important a part of the popular religion, and their enforcement was so emphasised that it is worth while setting them down in detail. They stand at the end of a group of prayers prescribed for different occasions, and are introduced by a brief account of the origin of these commands.

THE BOOK OF THE HEAVENLY LAW

What human being has not broken the Law of Heaven? In former times those who knew it not could give an excuse; now the Supreme God has set forth His merciful ordinance. From henceforth all who do repent of their sins before the supreme God, do not worship false gods, commit no evil actions, and do

²³ Lindley, *Ti-ping T'ien-kuoh*, I, 319-321. The Ten Commandments with the comments on them are found translated in *Pamphlets*, no 1; also in Brine, appendix. In the original they are found in *Tai ping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi*, IV, 19-21.

not break the heavenly laws, will be permitted to ascend to Heaven and enjoy endless happiness and majesty everlasting. All who fail to repent of their sins before the Supreme God, who wittingly worship false gods, do evil deeds and break the heavenly laws shall be condemned to the punishment of Hell, there to suffer eternal woe and sorrow unrelieved forever. Please consider for yourself which of these you would gain and which lose.

There is such a thing as failure on the part of our brothers and sisters everywhere to wake up. If we do not awaken eventually, we deteriorate, the devil surely leads us astray, and we have at hand indeed a happiness which we know not how to enjoy. Endless majesty in high heaven together with intense joy like this we are unwilling to experience; but are prone through our inclinations to follow the sin of resisting Heaven. In that way we greatly provoke the righteous anger of the Supreme God, and for punishment sink through the eighteen great Hells to suffer everlasting woe. How pitiable!

Now, there are those whose natural affections have been turned away by the Devil, who emphatically say that the rulers alone may offer worship to the Supreme God.

The Supreme God is the father of all human beings everywhere. The rulers are His powerful sons, good men are His filial sons, the masses are His simple sons, and the oppressors His perverse sons. Since they say that rulers alone may offer worship to the Supreme God, let me therefore ask the parents in the home, is it possible that only the elder sons may be filial to their parents?

There are also those who recklessly say that the worship of the Supreme God comes from foreign [literally, 'barbarian'] lands. They do not know that in the ancient times everybody—rulers and people alike—revered the Supreme God. As a matter of fact this highway of worship to the Supreme God is the great road on which China and foreign lands have walked together since the beginning when, in six days, God created Heaven and earth, mountains and seas and all human beings. Only, the various nations of the west have constantly traveled on this highway, whereas China walked on it for a millennium or two until she wandered off to the Devil's road, until she was ensnared by

the imps of Hell. Wherefore the Supreme God now has compassion on those who inhabit the earth, and stretches out His mighty arm to help men escape from the clutches of the Devil, to cause them to turn and walk once more on this original high-way, that they may not suffer the evil influences of the Devil before birth nor be caught by the Devil after death, but may ascend to Heaven and enjoy everlasting bliss. This is God's special favour, His incomparable grace. How greatly has that man's nature been deluded by the Devil who will not awaken, but on the contrary says that these things come from foreign lands!²⁴

The Ten Commandments, which formed an integral and prominent part in their worship, occur in their form of worship with text, comment, and a four-line stanza appropriate to the particular commandment.

Constantly observe the ten Heavenly laws.

(The ten commandments are ordained by God.)

The first Heavenly law: Render worship to the Supreme God.

(The Supreme God is Father of all nations under heaven.

All men are created and nourished by Him, all men are preserved by Him. All men ought reverently to adore Him morning and night, giving thanks for his mercy. The proverb says, 'Heaven bears, Heaven nourishes, Heaven preserves.' Another proverb says, 'In procuring food do not deceive Heaven.' Wherefore all who do not worship the Supreme God break the heavenly law.)

The Supreme God of Heaven is the true God;

Each morn and eve His worship should freely rise.

The ten divine commands should be observed,

Lest the Devil delude and darken one's true nature.

The second Heavenly law: Do not worship false gods.

(The Supreme God says, 'Aside from Me you shall have no other gods.' Wherefore, apart from the Supreme God,

²⁴ *Tai ping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi*, IV, 13 f. The idea of eighteen great hells is Buddhist.

all are false gods who deceive and harm the people on earth. By no means must they be worshipped. Whoever worships a single one of the false gods breaks the heavenly law.)

False demons with the greatest ease influence the spirits of men. Those who in error accept them at last become Hell's own victims.

We warn you, oh you brave souls, that you arouse yourselves,
And make haste to come into fellowship with your Almighty heavenly Father.

The third Heavenly law: Do not lightly utter God's name.

(The Supreme God was originally named Jehovah. Human beings must not utter the name in an unseemly manner. Those who do this, and those who curse Heaven, 'break the Heavenly law.)

High and majestic is the Heavenly Father! greatly to be revered,

They who rashly take his name soon come to grief.

Those who know not the true way should bestir themselves,

For to blaspheme lightly is an endless sin.

The fourth Heavenly law: On the seventh day offer worship and sing praise to the kindness of the Supreme God.

(On the sixth day God completed the creation of Heaven and earth, mountains and seas and human beings. The seventh day he had completed his work and called it the Sabbath day. Therefore men of this world who enjoy the blessings of the Supreme God should on the seventh day especially adore, worship and sing praises to the virtue of the Supreme God.)

Every blessing enjoyed on earth comes forth from Heaven;
To chant (Heaven's) virtue and sing his merit is surely reasonable.

Morning and night and at meals we should render thanks
But with greater reverence should we worship on each recurring seventh day.

The fifth Heavenly law: Be filial towards parents.

(The Supreme God says that if you are filial towards parents you can live long. Those who are intractable towards them break the Heavenly law.)

The records say that Shun was most filial to life's close,
For both lowly parents he prepared the utmost happiness
Exalting them to the skies. Such deserve to be requited
Since they failed not to care for us even before our birth!

The sixth Heavenly law: Do not kill or injure men.

(To kill others is to kill yourself; to injure others is to injure yourself. They who kill or injure others break Heaven's law.)

All under Heaven form a single family, all are brothers.
Why endure the cruel slaying and injuring of life?
Our forms and endowments are all the gift of Heaven;
If each follows each great tranquillity will result.

The seventh Heavenly law: Do not hold illicit intercourse.

(The many men on earth are a group of brothers; the many women on earth are a group of sisters. The sons and daughters of Heaven are arranged in companies, men with men and women with women, and they are not to be thrown together. When men and women indulge in illicit relations they may be called reprobates, transgressors to the highest degree of Heaven's law. Similarly, to cast lustful glances, to entertain lustful desire towards another, also to smoke opium and sing licentious songs, are transgressions of Heaven's law.)

Unlawful desire is by far the chief evil.

It transforms men into reprobates, then into fiends most pitiable.
Whoever hopes to enjoy the true bliss of Heaven
Must come through self denial and bitter discipline.

The eighth Heavenly law: Do not steal or rob.

(Poverty and wealth are alike determined by the Supreme God. Whoever steals men's things or takes them by force breaks Heaven's law.)

Though poor, accept your lot with contentment; you need not steal;

Perverse robbery is most base.

Violence to men reacts on him who does it—

Manly men, why not quickly change your course?

The ninth Heavenly law: Do not utter falsehoods.

(Whoever utters deceptions or tells of strange matters, whoever indulges in any kind of vile language or foul speech breaks Heaven's law.)

Falsehoods and bad language are all to be spurned;

Perverse deceitfulness sins against Heaven.

Multiplied evils of speech react on the speaker,

Diligently and closely cultivate the field of your heart.

The tenth Heavenly law: Do not covet.

(One who sees another's wife and covets that person's wife; when he sees that one's possessions are good and covets his possessions; also playing for stakes and the like—all violate Heaven's law.)

Those who are men must not covet at all,

The sea of desire engulfs one, its calamity is deep;

Before Mount Sinai was the law proclaimed,

In every clause the Heavenly commands glow to this hour!

They who turn and believe in the heavenly Father, the Supreme God, finally attain happiness;

They who harden their necks and rebel against the heavenly Father, the Supreme God, have weeping only.

Those who honor the Heavenly laws and worship the true God, when they depart, mount with ease to Heaven;

Those who follow worldly customs and believe in demons, on reaching the end, can scarce escape Hell.

Those soaked in the belief of false gods have become the complete slaves of the false gods—

Whom at birth tormenting devils suckle, who at death are seized by devils.

Those who respectfully worship God, are forthwith God's sons
and daughters—

Their place of origin is descent from Heaven, their destined
place is to ascend to Heaven.

Heaven above holds sway
You must nowise fear.
True hearts have much proof
They rightly may reach Heaven.

With pure heart honor God ;
Trust not bad men's lies ;
All desires curb entirely—
Then you can reach Heaven.

In Heaven the true spirit is one God ;
All who walk in error are utterly wanting in knowledge.
They bow down low to lumps of clay and images of wood—
For how long, pray, will your understanding be lacking ?

From Heaven, they wildly say it comes from foreign lands,—
In truth all men are foolish and stupid—
The ancient princes and people followed God.
Heroes, hasten, the devil defeat and close the gate.

Obey Heaven and obtain happiness ; oppose Heaven and perish.
To what end do the people of earth debate faults and virtues ?
Behold you were not originally idols' sons,
Why are you unwilling to turn toward Heaven ?

These commands were held in such honor that not only
were they required to be read each week at the great
gatherings for public worship, but also under penalty of
death each recruit was compelled to memorise them
within three weeks.²⁵ Obedience also was required to all
the commands by prescribing death for any infraction of
them. The seventh commandment, however, was by so far
the most important that its violation by one of the older

²⁵ See the laws published in *Tai ping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi*, VII, 4-8.

members of their community was punished by the terrible process known as lighting the lamp of heaven, or burning to death after having been wrapped in paper or coarse cloth and dipped in oil, a punishment ordinarily reserved for treason.²⁶ At least on the march, and probably within Nanking, the Taipings were so concerned about the relation between men and women that they carefully regulated the conditions on which husbands and wives should meet. The Western king is said to have put his own father and mother to death because they broke the commandment, saying of them to the assembled army: "Parents who transgress the Heavenly law are unfit to be parents."²⁷

Such strict interpretations of the commands must have been greatly relaxed after the first year or two of the movement, if not earlier. For the T'ienwang himself filled his palace with women, and the relations of Yang with the adopted sister of the T'ienwang caused the Western king to desire his punishment by the same laws; from which Yang delivered himself by an oracle from God which said: "Siu-ch'ing and Hsuen-chiao have both proceeded from the Heavenly Father and are therefore full brother and sister; though they are together constantly there is nothing blameworthy in it."²⁷ If such conditions existed in the higher ranks of the movement it is scarcely possible that they could enforce the rigid laws for long among the rank and file.

On one point the commandments and comments laid particular emphasis—the evil of idolatry. This led to a ruthless iconoclasm. Wherever the rebels went temples and idols, together with sacrificial vessels, were destroyed without regard to their value. In this way they destroyed relics and ancient sacrificial vessels worth

²⁶ *Tai ping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi*, VII, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XII, 12.

their weight in gold.²⁸ One can still discover places once famous for temples which have now become a wilderness through their destructive efforts.

The training of the people in the doctrines of their religion was a matter of great care on the part of the higher officials. The attendance on Sabbath worship, was compulsory; indeed, for officials of all grades more than compulsory. For they were apparently regarded as the leaders, possibly the teachers or priests of the movement. In every hamlet or district of twenty-five families one of the officers was responsible for conducting the religious services, and at least once a month a great assembly was called together from twenty-five of these parishes to hear some prince or high officer preach. No official could be absent from these great gatherings without ample excuse. For the first offence he was pilloried for seven weeks and beaten with a thousand blows; for the second he was put to death.²⁹ The addresses delivered on these great occasions, if Lindley's quotation of one of those he heard be a fair sample, were nothing more than patriotic addresses, calling on the officers and people to follow the T'ienwang until the empire was won.³⁰

In addition to the doxology and the hymn that followed it, the rebels prescribed forms and prayers for important occasions. In the repentance of sins, after the regular prayer was offered, the penitent was commanded to wash himself either in a basin of water or by immersing himself in a river. This was apparently their understanding of the ceremony of baptism. After this he must ask God for the guidance of His Spirit, must regularly offer prayer at meals, worship with the throng on the seventh day, observe the Ten Commandments, and abstain from

²⁸ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-tuch*, supplementary volume, II, 11a.

²⁹ *Tai-ping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi*, VII, 8.

³⁰ Lindley, *Ti-Ping Tien-Kwoh*, I, 319-321.

the worship of false gods of all sorts. These observances, if faithfully carried out, would secure the favor of God and win heaven. Prayers were prescribed for such occasions as marriages, funerals, thanksgiving after childbirth, and the building of houses. During the great ceremonies of state, sacrifices of animals were probably offered; in every service offerings of tea and rice were prescribed, and in some more important cases animals and wine as well.

In all these books and poems we can see the direct influence of the Western religion, but the interpretations and the ceremonials are chiefly Chinese, Confucian and Buddhist. The foreigners at first had some thought that the Taipings were sincerely attempting to set up the Christian religion, but they were estranged and shocked at the curious claims of the latter to supernatural guidance, in particular the blasphemous pretensions of the T'ienwang and the king of the East. Though they found certain outward forms of worship which they could recognise as similar to the ordinary Protestant ceremonial and though they perceived that pains were taken to give a certain amount of instruction to the rank and file, yet they felt that there was too much that was external on the part of the followers, and too fanatical and transparently hypocritical on the part of the leaders, to allow great expectations of realising the Christian state they had hoped for when the movement arose.

It is true that a few observers believed that the Taipings erred chiefly through ignorance of the truth and through misunderstanding of what the Christian religion was; and they argued that matters would be different later if the latter were given a chance to win the empire and come into free contact with the rest of the world. They understood that the Taiping religion contained much that was wrong, little that was Christian, much that

was blasphemous, and not a little that could be traced to the mores of a primitive people. But from the standpoint of their desire to open the country to intercourse with the West there was one great advantage—these people had courageously attacked the falsehoods and errors they believed to lurk in their Chinese religions and were brave enough to adopt the foreign Bible as far as they understood it. Under them foreigners might hope for greater progress and more favorable treatment than under the hopelessly conservative Manchu court and the Confucian gentry who supported it.

From the point of view of the native culture, on the other hand, there was never a moment's question that the mongrel religion of Hung was not Chinese. The natives accordingly spurned it with indignation. But apart from some of the leaders, who of sincerity or as a means of control emphasised the new religion, the people at large can have had very little understanding of any of the deeper matters of this faith. The heavy penalties for failure to learn the commandments by heart and for failure to attend the services indicate that the religion was practically forced on the people against their will. When such men as T'ienteh and the Chungwang were caught and wrote their confessions they do not appear to have exhibited any interest in the religion, but rather in the political objects of the enterprise—even the Chungwang who gave his horse to the young T'ienwang when the city of Nanking fell to the imperialists. If these men were more or less guilty of holding their religion lightly—though in the company of those who left Kiangsi there must have been hundreds of the humbler followers who did have sincere religious aspirations—what about the nation at large?

Could they have seen anything worthy of emulation in the religious absurdities of Hung and his followers or in

the confident claims to divinity? What they saw was not a pure religion but the attempt of a group of low-born peasants and laborers to seize the throne by calling superstition to their aid. Revolutionary societies had before this used religious creeds as a pretext. The whole Tai-ping movement appeared to the nation at large as a gross mockery on its religious side, particularly discredited in the assumption of the divine sanction for actions abhorred by society, and in the application of the death penalty for so many offences. They considered it at best a cruel religion. Its frontal attack on the popular beliefs and coldness towards the Confucian teachings, which formed the religion of the scholars, alienated those masses and leaders whose adherence was necessary to the cause.

In the first march upon Nanking they seemed to discern something more than this—they saw something masterful in the well-drilled army behind the uprising, something that might deliver the land from alien Manchu domination. But when the wave had spent its first strength and the contest settled down to a series of raids without much apparent motive or purpose except plunder, while the T'ienwang remained in the depths of his palace in Nanking, apparently interested in little but his religious fantasies, the hostility of the nation rose and forces gathered that eventually swept the rebels away.