

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Our Enemies

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At the outset, allow me to state that in this address I shall use the word enemy in a sense which does not occur to one readily, but which will be obvious as I proceed. Now, any one who stands in the way of our progress, advancement or happiness is our enemy. We hardly distinguish between an apparent enemy and a real one. We are concerned here only with the latter, but before I can proceed with advantage, I must assume that all admit the justness of the saying that it is cowardice not to acknowledge one's errors. (改憚勿则过)

In the British colonies of the Straits Settlements and Hongkong, the Chinese-born British subjects are now in the state of transition, socially and intellectually, between the old ways of our forefathers and the new doctrines of European civilization. Naturally, we are interested in the criticisms advanced in favour of or against the ancient systems and institutions, which had served our ancestors so well. It is excusable for us to be anxious to uphold these in the face of all attacks, but, however apt we are to act rashly and to regard influences which threaten to change our views as hostile to the integrity or permanence of our institutions, social or religious, we should conduct our defence intelligently and reasonably.

We are often tempted to regard Christian missionaries and "foreigners" with suspicion, imagining that they are the enemies of our society and our religion. We acknowledge the superiority of Western education, yet we are almost afraid that our sons, when enlightened by the culture of Europe, will turn against their fathers, and discard the heritage of our customs and religion for the usages and beliefs of the Aryan races. Without enquiring into the causes which make it possible for our children to lose completely their faith in the teaching of their fathers, we hasten to put down European culture as an influence inimical to our national existence, and will only tolerate Western education in homeopathic doses just sufficient for the purposes of commercial transactions. We foreclose discussion by begging the question that our civilization is superior to any other, and yet we confess that it has failed to give full development to our faculties. We try to explain away one difficulty by the assumption of another. In consequence, our attitude towards "foreigners" and Western civilization has been most uncertain and arbitrary - not to say conflicting. In self defence, many of us vainly imagine that by keeping our children

in the dark, we may thereby ward off the seductive attractions of European culture with its greater intellectual freedom and its greater social simplicity. In short, we have again and again confounded our apparent with our real enemies.

As to who are the latter, we may get the clue from the answers to the following questions: -

- (1) Who stands in the way of Chinese progress?
- (2) Who keeps back from them the philosophies and sciences, which have lifted up European nations from barbarism to the highest civilization?
- (3) Who prevents them from discarding their exploded theories for the exact discoveries of science?
- (4) Who is responsible for the antipathy of Chinese youths, (who have received only a good European education) towards Chinese formalism and the Chinese religion?
- (5) Who is the cause of the usual strong disregard of the Straits-born Chinese for the Chinese Classics, language and literature?
- (6) Who is to blame for the conversion to other religions (Christianity, Islam and Theosophy) of Chinese youths?
- (7) Who is the real culprit at the bottom of all Chinese want of success?
- (8) Who is the real instigator of the unfavourable opinions entertained against the Chinese?
- (9) Who made it possible for the Japanese to attack and crush China?
- (10) Who is answerable for the indignities inflicted on the Chinese abroad?

I submit that, from the conscientious and impartial answers to the above, we may draw a just conclusion as to who is our real enemy. Doubtless it will be allowed that those are our worst enemies who keep back our education, fetter our social life, traduce our religion, circumscribe our liberty, alienate our children and calumniate our nationality. Who, I ask, are the heartless authors of these dastardly outrages? What may we not be justified in doing against such enemies of our society, of our religion and of our race? Against such enemies, we may reasonably urge our direst vengeance; but, like Portia, I would remind you that mercy ought to season justice for - *“It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.”*

Would it not be wiser policy on our part to turn our enemies into our friends? Could we not reconcile them to a more rational view of our position? If we could succeed, it would be the best thing for us, for our enemies might cooperate with us in our struggles against ignorance and tyranny. In this case, it would not only be politic but essential that we should combine mercy with justice. But, you are all, doubtless, anxious to know who these terrible enemies may be. You have followed me so far in your mental vision and you must really pardon me, if, like the apparition of Shelley. I unveil before you the phantom of yourselves. Be not mistaken, our worst enemies are our own selves! In trying to show how we are our own foes, my remarks will fall naturally into three groups, namely those referring to (1) Education, (2) Customs and Social Life and (3) Religion.

Education

No people in the world appreciate the benefits of education and understand its civilizing influence so sincerely or so well as we do. What is perhaps more important - we have learned to love it for its own sake - and this love we have inherited from our ancestors who exiled themselves from their home in the midst of wild and restless tribes, antagonistic at once to the routine work of civilized society and to the nobler demands of literature. We must bear in mind this influence of our environment in taking a survey of the state of education among our people. The atmosphere, so to speak, has been unfavourable. Our forefathers were not all of them learned men; in fact, most of them were probably almost illiterate. But they came from a land of culture, imbued with an unbounded confidence in the excellence of Chinese literature, and although unable themselves to enjoy its beauties, they entertained for it a patriotic passion that led them to provide for their children instruction in the Classics of the Middle Kingdom. That the Chinese Babas have been able to maintain their integrity as a people is largely due to this wise and laudable policy of the early Chinese colonists. Otherwise, it would not be difficult to imagine what would have happened to them if they had lost their connection with the Chinese proper and had developed a monstrous jargon of their own, devoid alike of literature and of elegance. Fortunately, the earliest generations of Babas, while they spoke their truly "mother tongue", read, studied and enjoyed the written language of their fathers in those immortal *Shahs* and *Kings* which proclaim peace and happiness to the righteous and virtuous. They too, developed the same regard for the Chinese written language, and thus in spite of their Malay surroundings, they fostered the cultivation of literature in their midst glorying now in the wisdom of Confucius - admiring then the niceties and excellence of the "History of the Three Kingdoms" - and extending always through this ancient literature their intellectual and moral powers.

The British occupation of Malaya produced, as one of its first fruits, English schools to which the Chinese from the beginning have sent their children most willingly and gratefully. A good English education is, no doubt, the best legacy a Chinese or any other parent in the British Empire can leave to his children. But what is the sort of education the majority of our youths get? Our schools are not to be blamed. The teachers deserve every sympathy, and we may well excuse them if they cannot discover a royal road or short cut for their pupils. I regret to say that the "English education" is a very poor one so far as the majority of the boys are concerned. I do not call a smattering of everything styled knowledge - education, nor do I regard education as mere memory which enables a boy to repeat hundreds of lines from Milton or Shakespeare and to imitate with case in Baba English the latinity of Johnson or the florid style of Macaulay. What I deplore is the absolute staleness of the education our children get. There is neither spirit nor tire in all they learn. It is a mere routine of simple rules and memory work in which neither patriotism, nor piety, nor virtue, nor wisdom receives adequate justice, and the end of it all is a life-long drudgery at the counting desk. Chinese parents have not yet realised the dangers to

which they are fast approaching. A generation or two ago, a smattering of English was of some monetary value; and this fact made a great impression on many impecunious parents who broke the time-honoured custom of first teaching their children Chinese by sending their boys at once to an English school. Should this practice continue, we should have, in time, a group of Babas who would be as enlightened on the subject of Chinese literature and history as the Portuguese of Malacca are on the “Os Lusíadas” of Camoens and the glories of their nation under Henrique and the earlier Joams. Mr. HARE’s lecture also deals with this question, and it very wisely says: - “If you wish your son to have an intelligent understanding of both languages, it is, I am afraid, necessary to make the boy learn Chinese first.” It is impossible to cut adrift from a nation all its traditions and yet expect it to prosper; for away from its historical and radical connections, a people, like a tree severed from its roots, must wither away and degenerate. In my opinion, it is not only a mere matter of expediency, as Mr. HARE seems to suggest, that we should train our children in the two languages, but a question of the first importance as affecting our national existence. If we would not be swallowed up in the miscellaneous crowd which owns Malay to be its mother tongue, and a local *patois* of English to be the language which education confers, then we would do well to give our children a short course of Chinese studies on some simple and reasonable plan. We must try to understand that education, as conceived by our best thinkers, is quite sound in principle. Our countrymen in China do not look upon education merely as the means of earning their livelihood. Their idea, that education should ennoble man’s mind and purify his character, is the highest which we can entertain. Yet we should recognise that they are entirely in the wrong in confining education, as understood by them, to the study of the Classics. With a more liberal course of studies, including science and mathematics, our Chinese schools will become the complement of the English schools. We should in this way be able to maintain perfect whatever is best in our own language and customs and to replace what is questionable or undesirable by the introduction of the acknowledged good points of Western civilization. In this matter of education, in China as well as here, the Chinese themselves stand in the way of their advancement. Mistaken patriotism, unreasoning confidence in the infallibility of ancient authorities or credulity born of ignorance and superstition, and withal scepticism resulting reflexly from over-credulity, all these make it almost impossible for the average Chinaman to make up his mind that the educational methods of his ancestors should be altered.

Social Life

In our social life no less than in the schooling of our children, great changes have come over us, and yet we have not quite departed from the traditions of our fathers. I have shown how the earlier Chinese promoted the study of literature and thus ensured that their children would grow up to be educated Chinese, proud of the Classics. They had likewise instituted the ancestral cult in all its completeness in the midst of the Malays, who being Mohamedans

regard all other religions with contempt. Upon the worship or properly the rites due to deceased ancestors are based all the social and domestic duties which bind us together. Around these, there have grown up habits and customs which are not altogether desirable. In fact, some of the practices are perfectly iniquitous such as infanticide and foot-binding; although infanticide is fortunately not so prevalent as some would suppose, nor so peculiar to the Chinese as to be unknown in England, France or America. Foot-binding is a very cruel custom and its existence among such a sensible and practical people shows what power the imagination may exercise in the development of a race. Has not the poet uttered the oracle that “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin” in its weakness as well as in its glory? Tightlacing amongst Europeans and Americans not to mention the civilized and barbaric modes of puncturing parts of the body for wearing rings and ornaments, prove, if proof is necessary, that the Chinese are not the only slaves of custom. However, the Babas are fortunate in that they do not look upon artificially compressed feet at a necessary feature of feminine elegance, and it is devoutly to be wished that the same disgust at the barbarities requisite to distort our daughters’ feet may soon become universal in China. Emancipated from this barbarous custom, the Babas have learned from the Europeans to take an interest and a delight in physical exercise, and they deserve every praise for their pluck and achievements in athletics. They have also acquired the habit of breathing fresh air and of demanding it, although their superstition and ignorance impose upon them the necessity of living in an almost air-tight room whenever they are ill. In the matter of dress, the Babas show themselves to be sensible eclectics, but it may be regretted that the women or Nyonyas have abandoned the Chinese dress for the Malay costume. Perhaps it is hardly fair to say “abandoned”. It would be more correct to say “not taken to.”

Notwithstanding all these changes in the direction of improvement which the Babas have made in their domestic and social life, they still show no tendency to improve upon other customs of their fathers, chiefly those connected with marriage and death. They salute one another in European fashion. They highly appreciate European dinners and drink both wines and spirits with as much gusto as the Scotchman his whisky or the Frenchman his claret. But when a marriage comes round, then everything reverts to the ancestral type. The Mandarin or official - the stiffest form of etiquette is observed, and instead of the simple uncovering of the head or genial shaking of hands, the rules of propriety are followed. The horrid red table cloth replaces the pleasing snowy cover that speaks at once of good taste and cleanliness, the simple chop-sticks play the part of spoons and forks as in an orthodox Chinese dinner, and lastly the dishes are prepared and served up *à la chinoise*. Whenever a death happens, then the whole household is thrown into utter confusion. Heartrending cries, prolonged beyond the calls of emotion, fill the house with despair. All of a sudden, an excellent house elaborately furnished with the choice products of European and Asiatic art, is transformed as by the magic of an Aladdin, into a prehistoric abode of the dead, where intentional carelessness allows every rubbish to accumulate, and respect for the dead finds vent in the destruction or removal of every article that is pleasing or has the remotest connection with rejoicing or felicity. They

discuss politics and read the newspapers; they have yet to learn to dissociate men from their views. They have many clubs and associations, but a new principle has still to be introduced to make these a blessing and a social success.

After all, it may be asked: "Do we stand well socially as compared with the different peoples in the East?" I should certainly answer "Yes, but with further changes we might improve our position." Mr. ONG SIANG's interesting and exhaustive article relieves me from the necessity of referring to our women. But I might remind you that our wives will become the mothers of our children and hold in their hands the power that will shape the destiny of our race. Above all things, treat them generously, teach our children to be chivalrous, and give our women the same opportunities of physical and intellectual exercise. If we do not improve our social customs, the fault is ours. We clearly possess the remedy in our own hands, and if, through defective education or any other cause, we fail to apply it to all the social ills that now afflict us but that are not advisable to discuss in public, then we will certainly suffer all the consequences of our neglect, and not we only, but also our posterity.

Religion

Lastly, I will only say a few words about our national religion. I suppose there are some who will say that the Chinese have no religion. Hold any theory you please, the fact is the Chinese have as much religion, as the most devout nation in ancient or modern times. The most favoured religion of the Chinese is the system fostered by the school of Confucius. I believe when faithfully carried out and supported by a modern course of liberal education, Confucianism is the ideal religion for which the thinking and critical world is seeking. To put it very tersely, Confucianism is the religion of humanity with the acknowledgement of God. The other important religions are Taoism and Buddhism. There are many Chinese who say that the priests of these religions do not teach the right doctrines, and yet in time of need or trouble they are not ashamed to request the services of these very same priests. Modern Taoism is as unlike the transcendental philosophy of Lao-tze and Chwang-tze as the organization of modern Christianity is unlike that of the apostolic ages. Buddhism inculcates the practice of universal benevolence and personal chastity, and, in China, has gone through certain transformations which contrast it with the original Buddhistic gospels. In this hurried enumeration of religions, there are two allied religions of Western Asia which claim serious attention. Christianity many centuries ago entered China, and, like many other things which went that way, became absorbed in the institutions of the Middle Kingdom or died a natural death. Roman Catholicism, especially under the earlier Jesuits, made very great progress but its doctrines soon clashed with the interests of the Ta-tsing dynasty, and the extensive wealth and power of the Jesuitical priesthood rapidly declined. With the first quarter of this century, began active Protestant missionary propaganda, and both Americans and Europeans tried to convince the Chinese of the wisdom and superiority of their respective creeds. Unfortunately the coolie traffic, the

“opium” wars, and the barbarous treatment of Chinese in California counteracted all the good influences of the medical missionaries. At length the Chinese were compelled at the point of the bayonet to receive opium and to tolerate missionaries. It is not strange therefore that the majority of Chinese should refuse to believe the sincerity of Christendom. The Mohamedans have often given much political trouble, but the Chinese Mohamedans get on very well with their countrymen of other faiths. Mohamedanism and its prototype, Christianity, arose from a common Jewish basis. They both inculcate the practice of virtue and benevolence, and proclaim salvation to believers. My advice to you is to stick to whatever is best in the religion of your ancestors and learn from all prevailing religions whatever they can teach you. Remove from your religious life all superstition, all senseless fear of the Unseen, and try to practise toleration towards those with whom you differ. If you are sorry that the teachers of other religions influence your children in favour of their own faiths to the detriment of your own, the blame should not be attached to the missionary but to yourselves. Religion is both an instinct and a sentiment. When nothing in the shape of religious instruction is provided for your children, how can you be astonished if such children adopt those religious ideas with which they are first supplied? In this matter also, you see how your own good selves stand in the way of your emancipation from the thralldom of superstition. There can be no question that the best religion for the Chinese is pure Confucianism. Then let those who are afraid of their children losing the faith of their ancestors teach these children the words of wisdom in the Classics of Confucius. If they fail to do their duty, they ought rather to thank missionaries of other faiths for undertaking to make good their neglect. My last word to you is: - Abjure religions bigotry!

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