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ORDINARY MEETING.

THE PRESIDENT, SIR G. GABRIEL STOKES, BART., M.P., P.R.S.,
IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following Paper was read by the Author :—

CHINESE CHRONOLOGY.* By Rev. JAMES LEGGE,
M.A., &c., Professor of Chinese in the University of
Oxford.

The Historical Department of Chinese Literature.

1. **T**HE *Historical* is the second, and to my mind the most satisfactory, of the four departments into which the Chinese divide their national literature.† We have in what are called “The Twenty-four Dynastic Histories” records coming down to the year 1643 of our Christian era, and professing to extend over a space of 4,340 years, going back to the 4,587th year from our present A.D. 1890. These records are disposed in 3,264 books or chapters. My own copy of them, bound in English fashion, forms 73 portly volumes of imperial octavo size. If we can put faith in the ordinary Chinese tables of chronology, Hwang Tî,

* Read in 25th Session, Paper and discussion finally revised May, 1892.

† Classics ; History ; Philosophy and the Arts ; and Poetry and the *Belles Lettres*. See Wylie's *General Notes on Chinese Literature*, p. 1.

the Sovereign with whom these histories commence, began to reign in the 247th year of Noah's life, and 353 years before the Deluge; according to Calmet's arrangement of scriptural dates. According to that of Dr. Hales, the reign began nearly 150 years before the building of the tower of Babel, and 550 years before the birth of Abraham. I will not, however, now anticipate any judgment to which we may be brought in the course of our inquiries, concerning Hwang Tí, whether he should be regarded as a real or simply a fabulous personage. My object will be to lay before you, as concisely as I can, the two schemes of Chinese chronology, and consider how far we must admit or deny the claims based on them for the extraordinary antiquity of the nation.

Composition of the Dynastic Histories.

2. At the outset, let me call attention to one circumstance in connection with the dynastic histories. The first of them, called the Shih Chí, or "Historical Records," was written by Sze-mâ Ch'ien, who died in or near the year B.C. 85. It embraces the long period of about 2,600 years, from Hwang Tí to nearly the end of the reign of Wú, the sixth of the Han Emperors. It thus covers more than a century of the dynasty under which its author lived. But the other histories were all written after the dynasties which they commemorate had passed away; yet not long after. The rule is, that each succeeding dynasty shall commemorate the fates of that which preceded it. While the events may still be considered fresh, and all the important documents are accessible, a commission is issued for the compilation of the history. For instance, the latest of these histories is that of the Ming dynasty, extending from A.D. 1368 to 1643. As soon as the present Man-cháu holders of the Empire thought they had sufficiently consolidated their rule, a commission was issued in 1679, appointing 58 men of literary eminence to compose the Ming history; and the result of their labours, as we now have it, was laid before the Emperor of the Ch'ien-lung period in 1742.* This method is supposed to secure, and does no doubt secure in a great measure, impartiality of treatment, and access to contemporaneous documents, all the archives of the Empire being open to the writers.

* Wylie's *Notes on Chinese Literature*, p. 19.

The Chinese Institution of Historiographers.

3. But there is no question about the chronology of China since the rise of the Han dynasty in B.C. 206. Every reign and the length of it are well authenticated. Between 20 and 30 different dynasties have occupied the throne during the 2,096 years that have elapsed; but the clue that has dropped from the grasp of one House has immediately been seen in that of another. Two or more pairs of hands occasionally appear together, one trying to keep its hold of the clue, and the others to snatch it to themselves; but the narrative of the continuance of the government is unbroken. How was it, however, in the earlier times? Did Ch'ien derive his records from other documents contemporaneous with the events which they described? And how far back and with what precision of detail and date did such documents extend? To these questions answers can be given more full and satisfactory than might be expected.

Mâ Twan-lin, the encyclopædist, whose great work was published by imperial command in 1319, has stated as the result of his researches, that the office of historiography was instituted by Hwang Tî, and that its action may be traced down through the dynasties of Hsiâ and Shang.* I have not succeeded to my satisfaction in substantiating this statement; but I take occasion from it to refer to that office as existing certainly more than a thousand years before the time of Ch'ien. The testimonies of the Shû Ching, the Châu Kwan, and the Confucian Analects; the supplements to the Ch'un Ch'ü, and the narratives of the States, place this beyond a doubt. By means of the members of this body, who are variously denominated by translators,—‘recorders,’ ‘annalists,’ and ‘historiographers,’—provision was made at the Royal Court of Châu, from the commencement of the dynasty in the 12th century B.C., for the preservation of royal charges and ordinances, of accounts of the operations of the general government, and the histories of the different States; and also for the preservation and explanation of documents purporting to be come down from more ancient times. And as there were those officers at the royal court, there were similar functionaries at the courts of the various feudal princes. Of how these historiographers had been in the habit of discharging their duties we have the testimony of Confucius, that he had seen the time when one of them

* See the 51st chapter of Mâ's work, Article 7th. Read also the 1st section of the 1st chapter of my prolegomena to the *Shû*.

would leave a blank in his text rather than enter anything of which he was not sufficiently assured.* We are furnished by Tso Ch'û-ming with an instance in point of a somewhat different character, which occurred in B.C. 548, when Confucius was in his 4th year. In that year the Marquis of the State of Ch'i was killed in the mansion of Ts'ûi Chû, one of his principal ministers with whose wife he had been carrying on a shameful intrigue. The death was not inflicted by the minister's own hand, but it had his knowledge and approval. We hardly blame him for the deed; but the hereditary historiographer of the State, as he was bound to do, entered the notice of it in his tablets in the words, 'Ts'ûi Chû murdered his ruler;'† and the minister, enraged, caused him to be put to death, and the record destroyed. First, one brother and then another, who had succeeded to the office, repeated the offence and met with the same fate; a third brother took the fatal pencil and followed their example; but by this time such a general feeling of indignation had been excited by the events that the minister did not dare to deal with him as he had done with the others. He was obliged to let the man and the notice alone.

There were then historiographers in the time of Châu, and from an intimation in the 10th Book of that dynasty in the Shû Ching, we learn that similar officers had existed under the previous dynasty of Yin or Shang, the commencement of which dates from B.C. 1766. Beyond the Shang dynasty I have not been able to trace them. Mention is made indeed in the Shû of a writing made in B.C. 1321, and of another made earlier, about B.C. 1753. "Statutes of Government" are also referred to in the 4th Book of the Dynasty of Hsiâ, assigned to the 22nd century B.C., from which expression we must conclude that there existed even then a written code of laws in the country; and if there were written laws, there must have been further written records of every kind. We may safely believe that when Ch'ien undertook the composition of his work, the materials necessary for it were ready to his hand.

Some account of Sze-mâ Ch'ien.

4. Let me interject here some account of the man himself, brief indeed, but longer than I gave at the outset. He appended to his records a short autobiography which supplies

* *Analects* xv, 25.

† See the Tso Ch'wan, under the 25th year of Duke Hsiang.

the necessary materials. He traces his descent up to the time of the sovereign Chwan-hsü, a grandson of Hwang Tî, and claims that members of this line exercised functions connected with astronomy and historiography down into the dynasty of Châu. In the 8th century B.C., they assumed the surname of Sze-mâ, and were, for a century and a half, one Head of the family after another, the Grand-Historiographers at the Royal Court. The troubles of the kingdom drove them from the capital about B.C. 650, and individuals of them are traceable, now in one, and now in another of the feudal states, till in B.C. 320, or thereabouts, we find a Sze-mâ Ch'o at the court of the ambitious and growing state of Ch'in, which was already meditating the overthrow of all the other states or kingdoms, and the establishment of an imperial sway. His descendants served in Ch'in till the fall of the short-lived dynasty which was set up by Shih Hwang Tî, the builder of the Great Wall, the burner of the books, and the fell opponent of the Confucian *Literati*. On the rise of the Han dynasty they followed its fortunes, and we come to Sze-mâ Tan, the father of Ch'ien, in the position of Grand-Historiographer in the time of the emperor Wû. For thirty years, from B.C. 140 to 110, he filled that office. He was also versed in astronomy; an earnest student of the Yi-Ching; and endeavouring to survey impartially the various schools of thought which had arisen in past ages. The principles of Mo Tî which Mencius had vehemently assailed attracted him, and still more did those of Lâu-tsze. He had conceived above all the purpose of writing the history of the nation from the earliest times, and made considerable progress with it. Death surprised him, however, with his work unfinished; but he had the presence of his son, Ch'ien, with him, and solemnly and pathetically committed to him the completion of his undertaking.

Ch'ien was then, it has been thought, about thirty years old. He had been born at Lung-măn in the present Shen-hsi, near which the great Yü had commenced his famous labours on the deluge more than 2,000 years before. At the age of ten he could repeat the most celebrated pieces of the ancient literature. At twenty he commenced a series of extensive travels through the Empire, and visited the spots hallowed by memories of the departed great, and especially of Confucius. Not long before his father died, he had returned to the capital, to report the results of a military expedition to the western parts in the present province of Sze-ch'wan. He was appointed to succeed his father as

Grand Historiographer, and after the usual period of mourning entered on the task which had been entrusted to him. In five years, "amidst the stone chambers and metal coffers" of the Imperial library, he had brought his "Records" down to the year B.C. 104. As he was continuing his labours, in B.C. 98, in consequence of his connection with Lî L'ing, the leader of an unsuccessful expedition against the Hsiung-nû or Huns, a Turkic people on the north, he incurred the imperial displeasure, was thrown into prison, and suffered a cruel mutilation. Even there he did not cease from his labours. There is at least one passage in his work referring to events that took place in B.C. 91.

Such was Ch'ien, and such was his preparation for the great achievement of his life. He has been called "the Herodotus of China," but I do not think that the comparison of him to the author of "The Nine Muses" does him justice. We have no occasion, however, to speak of the nature and execution of his book, which has been the model of all the subsequent dynastic histories, excepting as regards the chronology of China to which all that I have thus far said has been introductory.

The First Certain Date of B.C. 842.

5. Ch'ien begins his records, we have seen, with the reign of Hwang Ti, which commenced, according to the usual tables, in the year B.C. 2697. But he himself did not venture to assign that or any other date to it. He did not find among the documents, to which he had access, any ancient era by their distance from which the recorders or annalists had been in the habit of showing the sequence of events in their national history. A list of sovereigns and of the lengths of their several reigns was the only method which there was of fixing the chronology of the past. And it would be a sufficiently satisfactory method if we had a list of sovereigns, and of the years that each reigned, that was reliable and complete. But we do not have this. The first year to which Ch'ien ventured to annex the cyclical expression of its date (of which cyclical expression I will speak by and by) was the 38th of Lî, the 10th of the kings of Ch'âu, and corresponding to the year, in our reckoning of time, B.C. 842. From that date downwards the names of the first years of the several cycles are all entered in Ch'ien's chronological table. The year in question, B.C. 842, called *K'ang-sh'ân*, was the first of the period known as *Kung-Ho*, or "Har-

monious Co-operation." The designation has reference to the fact that when king Li fled, or was driven, from the capital in the previous year, the Government was carried on by the dukes of Shão and Cháu, who acted together as Regents for 14 years, till the king's death in B.C. 829, when they placed his son, whom we call king Hsüan, a very different man, upon the throne. We may say, therefore, that B.C. 842 is the first era of Chinese chronology about the correctness of which there can hardly be any difference of opinion. From that time downwards, on to the present day, Chinese historical writers are agreed as to the rise of the different dynasties that have ruled the nation, the names of their several sovereigns, and the length of their reigns.

Substantiation of the Era B.C. 842.

6. Before we try to grope our way to Hwang Tî from the *Kung-Ho* period, it will be well to point out some considerations by which that date and others subsequent to it are substantiated. King Li was succeeded, we have seen, by his son, king Hsüan, in 827. He was succeeded in his turn, after a long reign of 46 years, by his son, king Yü, in 781; and in the *Shih Ching*, or "Book of Ancient Poetry," mention is made of an eclipse of the sun, which took place in Yü's 6th year. It is said:—

"The sun and moon met in the upper sphere,
The day *hsin-máo*, the tenth month of the year;
The moon was new, as she should reappear;
And then the sun, eclipsed, showed evils near;
The moon eclipsed before, and now the sun!
Alas! we men below shall be undone."*

It is found by calculation that this eclipse did take place on that *hsin-máo* day, corresponding to the 29th of August, new style, in B.C. 776; the first year, it may be remarked in passing, of the Olympiad of Corcebus, a principal epoch in Grecian history. The accession of king Yü, it is thus determined, took place in B.C. 781; that of his father king Hsüan in 827; and the fifteen years of his father king Li's dethronement bring us to 842, the era of *Kung-ho*. King Yü was succeeded by king P'ing, and towards the end of his reign, in B.C. 722, there begins the chronicle of the History of Lû, the native state of Confucius, compiled by him, and extending over 242 years, down to B.C. 481, two

* See the *Book of Ancient Poetry* in English verse, p. 229 (Trübner & Co., 1876).

years before he died. The whole period is called that of the *Ch'un Ch'ü*, or Spring and Autumn, from the name which he adopted for his work. The chronicle contains the record of 36 eclipses of the sun, as occurring during the period, of which 32 have been verified by calculation so far as the years and days assigned to them are concerned. The month of some of them is not correctly given, but I will show, ere we have done, that what seems to be an error of the month confirms the genuineness of the entries. Of the other four, which are erroneously reported, I need not speak. The error in regard to them may also be, I believe, satisfactorily accounted for; but here are 32 dates in that space of 242 years about which there can be no dispute. The first eclipse took place on February 14th, 720, and the next entry in the chronicle is that in the month after king P'ing died. The first year of his successor, king Hwan is thus determined to have been B.C. 719, as stated in the history. In a similar way we are able to fix the dates of eleven other sovereigns, bringing us to king Ch'ang, who came to the throne in B.C. 519.

After king Ch'ang we have not the same astronomical aids in verifying the chronology given by Ch'ien, but other sources of certainty are thenceforth multiplied; and I may venture to say that of no ancient history is the chronology so well authenticated as that of China since the era of Kung-Ho, B.C. 842.

The Annalistic Histories, and the Dates in them.

7. I may also say that the great historians of the country have not been forward or anxious to push the dates of their early records to a remote antiquity, though there is a general impression or suspicion to that effect among European writers. Our knowledge of China is derived mainly from Father de Mailla's *Histoire Générale de la Chine*, published at Paris in 1777, and which was translated from Ch'ü Hsi's "T'ung Chien Kang Mû," the preface to which is dated in A.D. 1172. This work was a reconstruction and condensation of another completed in A.D. 1084, by Sze-mâ Kwang, a distinguished statesman and author of our 11th century. They are both constructed on a different system from the dynastic histories, being *Annals digested under Headings and Details*, after the pattern of Confucius's "Ch'un Ch'ü" and the three well-known supplements to it. All that ability and research could do for the history of China seems to be accomplished in these two works. Ch'ü Hsi tells us, however, that when Kwang

made the first scheme of his Annals, he began with the first year of king Wei-lieh, corresponding to our B.C. 425. "Afterwards," it is added, "he extended his dates to the era of *Kung-Ho*. By and by he made his *Examination of Antiquity*, but he could find no dates of years earlier than that era. It was Shào K'ang-chieh* (died in 1077) who pushed the calculations up to the first year of Yáo." We cannot blame this Shào, one of the most famous scholars in the Augustan period of the Sung dynasty and a contemporary of Sze-mâ Kwang himself, we cannot blame him for what he did; but the note of Chû makes it plain that the cyclical dates assigned to events before B.C. 842, are the result of calculations by modern scholars of more or less ingenuity, but not commanding our confidence as if they were drawn from express mention of them in ancient documents. Let us, therefore, take here a new departure from that era, or, for convenience sake, from 827, the first year of king Hsüan, and try to find our way back, in the first place, to the commencement of the Cháu dynasty.

The Bamboo Annals, and Rise of the Cháu Dynasty.

8. We are confronted at this point by a chronology somewhat different from that which is commonly received. It is known as that of the "Bamboo Annals," and professes to be derived from a source with which Sze-mâ Ch'ien was unacquainted. The story goes that in A.D. 279 some lawless parties dug open the grave of king Hsiang of Wei, who died in B.C. 296, and found a great number of bamboo tablets, containing on them more than 100,000 characters. A committee of scholars was, of course, appointed to sit on them and examine them. The names of fifteen different Works, the tablets of which were more or less complete, were made out. Especially there was discovered a Book of Annals, beginning, like Ch'ien's Records, with the reign of Hwang Tì, and coming down to the year B.C. 299, the 16th year of the last sovereign of the Cháu dynasty. There the tablets had lain for 575 years in the bosom of the earth, and now they were thus unexpectedly brought to light:—were they genuine? A controversy necessarily arose on the subject, and it can hardly be said to be yet settled. The opinion of scholars is for the most part unfavourable to their genuineness; but I

* See a note in my prolegomena to the third volume of *The Chinese Classics*, p. 83.

am not concerned to adjudicate here in the strife. Let us accept the years of the Bamboo Annals as one scheme of chronology, and those of Sze-mâ Kwang, ordinarily received, as another, and see the difference between them. Ch'ien, as we have seen, fails us altogether after B.C. 842.

The two schemes enumerate the ten kings of the dynasty before Hsüan, agreeing also in their order and in their names. Five of the reigns are also of the same length—36, 26, 55, 12, and 35 years respectively; the other five are shorter in the Bamboo scheme, being of 6, 19, 9, 8, and 26 years, instead of 7, 51, 15, 16, and 51. The ten in the longer scheme amount to 295 years; in the shorter, to 223. These two numbers, added to 827, give B.C. 1122 and 1050 as the year when the Châu dynasty commenced. The difference between them is only 72 years.

In the last chapter of his works, and wishing to make the distance as short as he possibly could, Mencius says that "from king Wăn to Confucius there were 500 years and more." He, no doubt, intended his "from king Wăn" to be equivalent to "from the beginning of the Châu dynasty," and his "500 years and more" to be equivalent to "more than 500 years and less than 600." In this way we have to conclude that the era of Châu was between B.C. 1051 and 1151. The date of 1122 cannot be far from the truth.

To the Rise of the Shang Dynasty.

9. We go on next to the dynasty of Shang, or Yin which preceded Châu. The received chronology assigns to it 28 reigns and 644 years; that of the Bamboo Books 30 reigns and 508 years. The dynasty began, according to the former, in B.C. 1766; according to the latter, in 1558.

The differences in the number of reigns is unimportant and, if the schemes otherwise agreed, would only affect the length of the dynasty by six years. In the 15th of the Books of Châu in the Shû Ching, the names of three of the Shang sovereigns are given, and the lengths of their reigns, 75, 59, and 33 years,—to show how Heaven crowns a good king with long life and sway. The two schemes agree in the length of those reigns and of five others. Pan Kû, the historian of the first Han dynasty, made the duration of the Shang to be 529 years, and there is a statement in the Tse Chwan that it lasted 600 years. In the passage of Mencius to which I have already referred, he says that from T'ang the founder of Shang, to King Wăn of Châu there were "500 years and more." From all this we may conclude that

the 644 years of the received chronology are too many, and the 508 of the Bamboo Books too few; and the difference between the two schemes has now increased to 208 years.

To the Rise of the Hsiâ Dynasty. A Solar Eclipse.

10. To Hsiâ, the first of the three feudal dynasties, the common scheme assigns 439 years, and the Bamboo Annals 403. The former makes it begin in B.C. 2205, and the latter in 1961. The difference in the two schemes is not great as regards the duration of the dynasty, though they agree only in the length of three of the seventeen reigns which each specifies. Mencius says that from Yâo and Shun to T'ang "there were 500 years and more." If we allow, as both schemes do, 150 years for the period of Yâo and Shun, and add that number to 439 or 403, the sum in each case is under 600 years. The period usually assigned to the Hsiâ dynasty must be nearly correct. In the 4th of the Books of Hsiâ in the Shû, it is said that during the reign of Chung K'ang, the 4th of its kings, there was an eclipse of the sun in the sign Scorpio. The particular year is not mentioned, but only the month and the day. The received chronology refers it to the first year of his reign, the year B.C. 2159. There was, however, no such eclipse in that year; but Father Gaubil calculated that such a phenomenon occurred on the very month and day of Chung K'ang's 5th year. Subsequent calculations, however, seem to have brought it out that that eclipse took place in the night, and could not have been visible at the then capital of China. Chinese astronomers of the T'ang dynasty are said to have proved that there was an eclipse fulfilling the conditions of the text of the Shû in B.C. 2127, which would take us into the reign of Chung K'ang's son. I have been loth to give up the eclipse of Gaubil; but while any uncertainty attaches to it it should not be pressed into the service of chronology.*

The period of Yâo and Shun.

11. We come now to the earliest period of Chinese history for which the claim of documentary evidence can be advanced with any show of reason, the period, namely, of Yâo and Shun.

The first two Parts of the Shû Ching are occupied with the

* While writing this paper, I have received an elaborate article on this Eclipse by Dr. G. Schlegel, Professor of Chinese in the University of Leyden, and Dr. Franz Kühnert, of the Imperial Observatory, Vienna. They think the most likely date for it is the 7th May, 2165 a.c.

events of their time. They contain in all five different Books or Sections; but it cannot be claimed for them, nor indeed for the first Book of the next Part, which describes the labours of the Great Yü on the inundated country, that they are records contemporaneous with the events which they relate, though their compilers, I do not doubt, had some such records before them. At what time the documents, in the form in which we now have them, were composed we cannot tell. I do not, indeed, believe that the compilation of the Shû was made, as Chinese authorities affirm, by Confucius; but he was well acquainted with it; and both he and Mencius regarded it as giving the earliest account of their national history. The existence of Yáo, Shun, and Yü is not to be doubted. I could as soon doubt the existence of Abraham and the other Hebrew patriarchs in our Sacred Scriptures. The question is not as to their existence, but as to the time to be assigned to them on the chart of chronology.

According to the common Chinese scheme, the reign of Yü began in B.C. 2205; that of Shun in B.C. 2255; and that of Yáo in B.C. 2357. The Bamboo Books, of course, reduce these dates, and their cyclical year of Yáo's accession places it in B.C. 2145.

In *The Canon of Yáo*, which forms the first Book of the Shû, that sovereign is found instructing his astronomers to determine the solstices and equinoxes by the culminating of certain stars, which he specifies. The Rev. Dr. Pritchard, Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford, kindly prepared for me a chart of the stars as they were visible in China in B.C. 2300. This has been published in the third volume of *The Sacred Books of the East*, and an inspection of it shows that all the phenomena mentioned by Yáo might have been seen by an intelligent observer at that date. I do not say that this determines the exact place of Yáo in chronology, and much less that it determines the year in which his reign or chieftaincy began; but it makes it probable, to say the least, that the date assigned to him in the common scheme, and the statements in the Shû, are not to be hastily set down as extravagant or without good foundation.

To sum up what has thus far been said:—About the era of Kung-Ho, in B.C. 842, there can be no doubt; and China was then a very considerable nation. Of earlier dates we cannot speak with the same certainty, but we seem to be able to trace the prints of its history up to B.C. 2000 and a few centuries beyond it. The difference of about 200 years in the two schemes of which I have spoken need not seriously

affect our judgment. As the balance of credibility inclines in favour of the longer estimate, up to the 24th century B.C., the chronology of China may be pronounced to be historic.

Can we trace our way back to Hwang Tî?

12. We must plunge now into the shadowy ages before Yâo, and try if we can discover in them any traces of what can be considered historical narration. There must have been men, subjects and rulers, anterior to him. Even in the "Shû," Shun speaks in one place of "the barbarous tribes that were disturbing the Great, Bright Land,"* and in another, of "the emblematic figures delineated by the ancients"† on robes of state. Can we find anywhere contemporaneous accounts of those "ancient" men? It is plain to me that Sze-mâ Ch'ien had no written documents with dates in them earlier than those of the Shû Ching. He begins his history, as I have already stated, with Hwang Tî. Hwang Tî is followed by his grandson, Chwan-hsü. After him comes the Tî Ch'û, also a grandson of Hwang Tî, but not a son of Chwan-hsü. Then we have two sons of this Tî Ch'û, first Chih, who soon comes somehow to a bad end, and gives place to his brother, the famous Yâo. But in his chapter on the five Tî, Ch'ien assigns no length to the reign of Hwang Tî, nor to those of the sovereigns between him and Yâo.

The Bamboo Annals assign to Hwang Tî a reign of 100 years; to his son, whom Ch'ien barely mentions, a very short record, with no specification of the length of his reign; to Chwan-hsü, 78 years, and to the Tî Ch'û 63 years. A note adds that *his* son Ch'ih was deposed after a short reign of nine years.

In the ordinary chronological tables, six years are allowed to Ch'ih, Yâo's brother. Yâo's first year is B.C. 2357; the Tî Ch'û's, 2432; Chwan-hsü's, 2510; Hwang Tî's son Ch'ih's, 2594; and Hwang Tî's, 2697.

When we compare what Ch'ien says about Hwang Tî with what we find in other books, his language must be pronounced very careful and subdued. The Bamboo Annals, for instance, say that in Hwang Tî's 59th year the chiefs of "the Perforated Breasts" and of "the Long Legs" came and made their submission to him. There is a book called *The Book of Hills and Rivers* (concerning which Mr. Wylie inclines to the opinion that it existed in the Châu dynasty and portions of it probably earlier), in this book it is said that anciently

* Part II, i, 20.

† Part II, iv, 4.

there was a region where the people had a hole in their breasts, and carried one another on a pole which went through it, and another region where men's legs were more than 30 feet long. Such notices are not history, but silly fables, and there are none of them in Ch'ien. The nearest approach to them is his account of Hwang Tî's battles with the rebel Ch'ih-yû, against whom he led bears, panthers, tigers, and other fierce animals which he had trained to fight; and this may be only a metaphorical description of the courage of his soldiers. What is more remarkable is that Ch'ien's account contains none of the great inventions, representing mighty strides in the progress of early civilization, gathered from the mass of ancient legends by the labours of Sze-mâ Ch'ang of our 8th century, of Sze-ma Kwang himself, and of Liû Shû, one of Kwang's ablest collaborateurs, who ascribe them to Hwang Tî, and even earlier men, so that they have been prefixed as introductions to some editions of the great Histories of Ch'ien and Kwang, and chronicled in Compendiums of them as veritable achievements of social progress. Ch'ien might have introduced them into his records, but his historical instinct rejected them, and he found no solid ground to rest upon earlier than the documents of the Shû Ching.

Of the Three Hwang and Five Tî.

13. But when speaking, earlier in the Paper, of the ancient institution of historiographers in China, I said that provision was made under it for taking care of the histories transmitted from earlier times. In the Ch'iu Kwan it is said concerning the historiographer of the exterior, "He has charge of the Books of the Three Hwang" (meaning Great or August ones; the character is different from the Hwang of Hwang Tî) "and the Five Tîs." Who were those three Hwang and five Tîs? The question has wonderfully vexed all Chinese archæologists, and hardly two of them agree in their replies to it, though the names themselves, Hwang and Tî, were associated together by the founder of the dynasty of Ch'in to form the imperial designation of himself and all who should descend from him and occupy his throne; and Hwang Tî is now applied by the Chinese to all foreign potentates who have the title of Emperor.

Further, in Tso Kh'û-ming's Commentary and Supplement to the Ch'un Ch'û, under the year B.C. 530, there is a narration,—that the lord of the semi-barbarous region of Ch'û boasted that his grand historiographer could read the Three

Făn, the Five Tien, the Eight Soh, and the Nine Ch'ü. A visitor from another and more civilized State, to whom the boast was made, intimated that he hardly believed it, and made the lord of Ch'ü ill by his reply. Whether his scepticism went so far as to deny the existence of the Three Făn and other books we cannot tell. No Chinese writer whom I have consulted, however, ventures to go so far. Mă Twan-lin says that "the books have perished, and what is said about them in those two passages need not receive much consideration." Many critics and scholars, however, have not shown Mă's good sense. K'ung An-kwo, a descendant of Confucius of the 2nd century B.C., thought that the Three Făn were the same as the Books of the Three Hwang in the Chău Kwan, and that of "the Five Tien" we have portions in the first two Books of the Shü, which are called the Tien or Canons of Yăo and Shun. The Eight Soh are supposed to have given an explanation of the Yî King; and if there ever were such a book, I am sorry for the loss of it more than for that of all the others. The Nine Ch'ü, it is thought, may have been a statistical account of the nine regions or provinces into which the country was divided. But the Soh and Ch'ü are gone, and Mă Twan-lin says nothing to exempt the Five Tien from the same fate; nor does he refer to a publication of our 11th century, which purported to be a recovery of the Făn, but which Chinese scholars generally have consigned to the limbo of things

"Abortive, monstrous, and unkindly mixed;"

in other words, have regarded as a poor attempt at forgery. But that expression in the Chău Kwan, "the Books of the Three Hwang and Five Tî," has led to an amount of chronological speculation of which it is necessary that I should take some further notice.

I will say nothing about the Books; they confessedly perished long ago, unless we have a fragment of them remaining in the Canons of Yăo and Shun. But as to the men themselves—if they ever existed—who were they? Mă Twan-lin makes them out to have been Fu-hsi (often called Fô-hi, and said to be the founder of the Chinese nation), Shăn Năng, the father of husbandry and medicine, and Hwang Tî. This was not Ch'ien's view, for, as we have seen, he makes Hwang Tî the first of the Five Tî, and in his chronological table he has no name, either of Hwang or Tî, before him.

Mă was influenced, no doubt, by what is said in the

longest appendix to the Yi Ching,* where those three personages are spoken of as having led the way in the processes of civilisation, and taught the savage people around them how to make nets for hunting and fishing, to cultivate grain and vegetables, to build houses for themselves instead of living in caves, and to make and use coffins, to subdue the ox and the horse for their service, and to hold markets at which to exchange commodities for their mutual benefit.

Those old fathers especially invented written characters, and substituted them for the knotted cords which had been previously employed to maintain the memory of events and engagements.

Because these things are related in that appendix to the Yi Ching, the authority of Confucius has been pleaded for them; but only those portions of that appendix which commence with the formula, "The Master said," can with any show of reason be ascribed to him, and that formula is not prefixed to those statements. All that we can say about them is, that when the appendixes to the Yi were made, probably towards the end of the Cháu dynasty and after the death of Confucius, such stories may have been current, and were gathered up and stereotyped in *The Great Supplement*.

But nothing is said there about when or how long those three Hwang reigned. The late Mr. Mayers, adopting B.C. 2697 as the date for Hwang Ti, makes Shān Nāng's reign commence in 2739, and Fu-hsi's, in 2852. In the Tables of Twan Chang-chí, published in 1814, we go through seven reigns before Hwang Ti, in the line of Shān-nāng, up to the first year of that sovereign in 3322. Fifteen reigns in the line of Fuh-hsi then bring us to him; but there is no attempt to give the length of the period, only to Fuh-hsi himself there is assigned a reign of 110 years.

Immense Periods of the Later Táoists.

14. But even these figures dwindle into insignificance before others which are to be found in books all later than our Christian era, and must be put down as nothing but the wild reveries of Táoistic speculation; its wild reveries, especially after it had come into contact with Buddhist missionaries from India, and learned something of the Indian doctrine of a succession of worlds. The earlier Táoist writers, Láo-tsze himself, Lieh-tsze, and Chwang-tsze, all

* *The Sacred Books of the East*, xvi, pp. 382-5.

speculated about the beginning of historical time, and traced the evolution, development, or "becoming" of things through four stages, down to the state of Chaos. One name for this Chaos was P'an-kû, and by and by P'an-kû was personified, and became the first man, or rather the first King, for he found himself among other men who had come into being as mysteriously as himself, and were multiplying without the sanctities of marriage, and living without the knowledge of fire to cook their food or defend themselves from cold. After P'an-kû they place the three Hwang, or rather the three Hwang lines, consisting of 12 Celestial Augustuses, 11 Terrestrial, and 9 Human, to each individual of which they assign a length of 18,000 years. After these there come a number of Chî or Periods, something like the Indian *Kalpas* and *Yugas*, the last of which is still running its course; and which all have strange names that do not look or sound like Chinese. The lengths of the several *Chî* are different; but from the beginning or the separation in Chaos of heaven and earth, down to B.C. 481, two years or thereabouts before the death of Confucius, there had elapsed 2,276,000 and odd years, or, according to Sze-ma Ch'ang, 3,276,000 years. Other calculations are much more extravagant. The lowest surely gives an extent of time which should satisfy all the demands of evolutionists. My only excuse for troubling you with such representations is, that I wished to give you a sketch, at least, of all that is to be found in Chinese literature on the chronology of the nation.

But no writer of any character pays attention to those wild speculations. Back to B.C. 842, as I have repeatedly said, the chronology of China is as surely established as we could desire. For about 1500 years more, to the time of Yâo, we seem to have some historical guidance, though the mile-stones or time-stones of the course become more difficult to decipher the farther back we go. Various considerations connected with the origin of the written characters, and the social condition which the earliest of them indicate in the condition of the then existing people, make me not unwilling to admit earlier centuries not a few for the commencement of Chinese civilisation, but I dare not venture to specify how long or how short that formative period may have been.

The Chinese Cycle of Sixty.

15. There is just one other topic on which I must touch to complete my lecture, and then I will conclude by adverting to a new phase of speculation which has recently been

challenging consideration. The first cyclical name for a year found in Sze-mâ Ch'ien is, we have seen, that for the era of *Kung-Ho*, which he enters as the year *Käng-shän*.

For the measuring of days and years the Chinese use a cycle of *sixty*. It is composed of two series of characters, one consisting of *ten*, which are called "the Heavenly Stems," the other of *twelve*, which are called "the Earthly Branches." The first stem is called *chiá*, and the first branch *tsze*. These two, joined together, make *chiá-tsze*, the first term of the cycle. The two second characters, *yi* and *ch'au*, are similarly joined, and make the second term, and so on with the other terms to the tenth, which is *kwei-yü*.*

* It may be well to subjoin here a table of the cycle both in Chinese and English.

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 甲子, chiá-tsze | 21 甲申, chiá-shän | 41 甲辰, chiá-ch'än |
| 2 乙丑, yí-ch'äu | 22 乙酉, yí-yü | 42 乙巳, yí-sze |
| 3 丙寅, ping-yin | 23 丙戌, ping-hsü | 43 丙午, ping-wü |
| 4 丁卯, ting-mão | 24 丁亥, ting-hái | 44 丁未, ting-wei |
| 5 戊辰, wü-ch'än | 25 戊子, wü-tsze | 45 戊申, wü-shän |
| 6 己巳, chí-sze | 26 己丑, chí-ch'äu | 46 己酉, chí-yü |
| 7 庚午, käng-wü | 27 庚寅, käng-yin | 47 庚戌, käng-hsü |
| 8 辛未, hsín-wei | 28 辛卯, hsín-mão | 48 辛亥, hsín-hái |
| 9 壬申, jän-shän | 29 壬辰, jän-ch'än | 49 壬子, jän-tsze |
| 10 癸酉, kwei-yü | 30 癸巳, kwei-sze | 50 癸丑, kwei-ch'äu |
| 11 甲戌, chiá-hsü | 31 甲午, chiá-wü | 51 甲寅, chiá-yin |
| 12 乙亥, yí-hái | 32 乙未, yí-wei | 52 乙卯, yí-mão |
| 13 丙子, ping-tsze | 33 丙申, ping-shän | 53 丙辰, ping-ch'än |
| 14 丁丑, ting-ch'äu | 34 丁酉, ting-yü | 54 丁巳, ting-sze |
| 15 戊寅, wü-yin | 35 戊戌, wü-hsü | 55 戊午, wü-wü |
| 16 己卯, chí-mão | 36 己亥, chí-hái | 56 己未, chí-wei |
| 17 庚辰, käng-ch'än | 37 庚子, käng-tsze | 57 庚申, käng-shän |
| 18 辛巳, hsín-sze | 38 辛丑, hsín-ch'äu | 58 辛酉, hsín-yü |
| 19 壬午, jän-wü | 39 壬寅, jän-yin | 59 壬戌, jän-hsü |
| 20 癸未, kwei-wei | 40 癸卯, kwei-mão | 60 癸亥, kwei-hái |

The tenth term exhausts the stems, and then the first stem is joined to the eleventh branch, and the second to the twelfth, making *chiá-hsü* and *yi-hái*, the eleventh and twelfth terms. The twelfth term exhausts the branches; but the third stem is then prefixed to the first branch, making the thirteenth term, which is *ping-tsze*. And so the process goes on till we reach sixty, the least common multiple of ten and twelve. No more different combinations can be made with the two series of characters. The cycle is completed and a new one begins. To speak of sexagenaries instead of centuries sounds strange to us; but I would make little account of that, if we could tell where the inventors got the idea of its component parts,—the ten stems and the twelve branches, and how they were led to the employment of the characters,—for the most part hardly more complex in form than our figures, by which these characters are denoted.

The Cycle at first intended for Days, not Years.

16. Thus far, however, I have been baffled in my endeavours to discover light on these points. It is more important to observe that authorities agree that the object of the cycle at first was to keep a record of days and not of years. In the *Shû* and some of the other *Ching*, we find many such applications of it to days, but not a single instance of its application to years. We have seen that the cyclical names annexed to the years in *Sze-mâ Kwang's* history were not carried back to the time of *Yáo* till our eleventh century; and much in the same way it has been proved that the cyclical dates for the years in the *Bamboo Annals* were not in the tablets when they were disinterred in A.D. 279, but are a subsequent addition. Of the astonishing accuracy, however, with which the cyclical terms were employed in the record of days, we have an example in the notices of the solar eclipses, which are recorded, as I said, in the *Ch'un-ch'ü* of *Confucius*. Of the thirty-six eclipses mentioned in that computation, extending over 242 years, thirty-two have been verified by calculation. The year is always right, and the day; but the month is often wrong; the error in the months being explained by the irregularity with which the process of intercalation,* according to the Chinese method, was conducted. The very error is a strong confirmation of the genuineness of the history;—it is a fine illustration on a con-

* See this proved by Dr. Chalmers in the prolegomena to *The Chinese Classics*, vol. v, pt. i, pp. 93—97.

siderable scale of the adage, *Exceptio probat regulam*. But there was no room for such error in recording the days. That only required care from day to day, and needed no science. "The rule of thumb" was sufficient for it. The task of the Recorders in regard to days was not more difficult than that of Robinson Crusoe on his desert island, when, as he tells us, he marked the lapse of his days by making a notch for each. Illness and accident might occasion intermissions and errors in the case of a single individual. The entries would be made regularly, when to make them was the work of a Board composed of many scholars.

Barbarous Names in Ch'ien's Cyclical Table for Intercalation.

17. We cannot tell when the cyclical terms were first employed to chronicle years as well as days. If the entry of *K'ang-sh'ân* in Sze-mâ Ch'ien's history for the year B.C. 842 was made by himself, the credit of the ingenious application is due to him. In his work, however, we find a table constructed for the purpose of intercalation over a period of 75 years, the first year being B.C. 104. Instead of employing the Chinese cyclical characters in it, he uses words of two and three syllables, borrowed we may say, evidently, from some foreign language.

This strangely sounding cycle is still 1 of 60, made up of 10 stems* and 12 branches. The first term in the selected period, for instance, properly indicated by *ting-ch'âu*, appear in it as *Yen-f'ang Sheh-t'î-ko*. Where did Ch'ien find all his dissyllables and trisyllables? He did not invent them himself, for we find two of them in the poem called *Lî Sáo*, written by Ch'ü-yüan of the 4th century, B.C., whose suicide is still commemorated in parts of China by the festival of Dragon Boats. And the outlandish thing did not long maintain itself. The polysyllables were superseded in the time of the usurper Mang, that is, in the period A.D. 9-22, by the monosyllables of the cycle proper. They all occur, indeed, in the vocabulary or *Rudimentary Dictionary of the R Yá*, which is mainly a compilation of the Han Dynasty.†

* *The Historical Records*, Bk. 26, the 4th of Ch'ien's Monographs. The ten stems are read: *yen-f'ang*, *twan-m'ang*, *yü-ch'áo*, *chiang-wú*, *t'ü-wei*, *chü-lí*, *shang-h'ang*, *ch'áo-yang*, *h'ang-ái*, and *shang-chang*; and the twelve branches are *sheh-t'î-ko*, *tan-eh*, *chih-hsü*, *tá-mang-lo*, *tun-tsang*, *hsieh-hsiah*, *ch'ih-fun-jo*, *tso-eh*, *yen-máu*, *tá-yüan-hsien*, *k'wun-tun*, and *jui-han*.

† See Wylie's *Notes on Chinese Literature*, p. 7. He says:—"The authorship is attributed, with considerable probability, to Tsze-hsif (one of

For about 400 years the strange names and their application in chronology are to be found in Chinese literature, and then they disappear. We may compare the case to what geologists call a *fault* in a stratum or vein which occasionally interrupts the progress of mining operations. Where did they come from? What is the meaning of them? I have in vain explored the documents of Chinese literature for answers to these questions. The *Ê Yá* has come down to us with a commentary by Kwo P'ò, a famous Tàoistic scholar and antiquarian, who died in A.D. 324; and he tells us that he did not understand those names, and put them on one side, without attempting to explain them. A discovery may be in store for the explorers in Sanskrit or Assyriology, or some other Eastern mine. But let it be borne in mind that the use of the cycle of sixty for the measurement of days, and, possibly, other periods of time, was long—very long—antecedent to Sze-mâ Ch'ien. How it arose is another mystery, and to me a deeper mystery than his application of it with strange names to the chronology of years.

In T'wan Chang-chí's tables, to which I have made reference more than once, "the stems and branches" are entered as an invention of one of the Celestial Augustuses millions of years ago; and then, again, the same tables say that Hwang 'Tí commissioned Tâ-Não, one of his ministers, to make the Chiá-tsze cycle. This last is the current tradition, which further places the achievement in Hwang-'Tí's 60th year, which would be B.C. 2637. The same statement is found in the introductory chapter to Chû Hsi's *Redaction of Sze-mâ Kwang's History*. The only authority given there, however, for the statement is the work of Liú Shû of our 11th century, whom I have already mentioned as an associate of Sze-mâ Kwang. But Tâ-Não does not appear in Ch'ien's Records, nor in the Bamboo Annals, nor in Pan Kú's History of the first Han dynasty; and I am not able to accept him as a historical personage. It remains for scholars to discover when and where the cycle of sixty first arose, and its terms took the peculiar and elegant nomenclature which they have in Chinese. Both the stem and branch names appear frequently in the Shû Ching in the Books of Cháu. But the Shû contains only one such earlier specification of a day,—in the 4th of the Books of Shang, representing probably a

the ablest of Confucius' disciples), though there is a tradition that a part of this had also been handed down from Cháu Kung." But it has been proved to be in many parts only of the Han.

day in the 12th month of the year B.C. 1753, according to the common chronology. But that the stem names at least were in existence at a still earlier time is proved by the use of them, though without their branch complements, by the Great Yü, to designate certain days of the year B.C. 2287, according to the same chronology.

Was the Cycle of 60 of Indigenous Origin in China?

18. Are we to rest then in the belief that the sexagenary cycle was of indigenous origin in China? It is impossible for me to work myself into a *furor* on such a question; but I have neither read nor heard anything of force enough to make me think it was not so. The Hindoos had a cycle of 60 years, "the Vrihaspati chakra, or cycle of Jupiter." It is very ancient, but its origin has not been discovered; and it is allowed that possibly it may have gone to the Hindoos from the Babylonians, together with other astronomico-chronological or astrological periods, and various astronomical knowledge.* And it is possible, further, that the knowledge of the cycle may have travelled either from India or Chaldea to China. But is not the reverse equally possible? There is no impossibility either way; and where there is no conclusive evidence to determine the mind in favour of the one supposition or the other, it would serve no purpose to discuss the probabilities which have been urged in favour of the Chinese origin or of one more Western:—

"Non nostrûm tantas componere lites.

I prefer to guide myself by an excellent critical canon of Confucius:—"Hearing much, put aside the points of which you stand in doubt, and at the same time speak cautiously of the others."

Hwang Tî not to be Identified with the Babylonian Nakhunta.

19. Some scholars, however, have in recent years eagerly maintained the connexion of the old Chinese literature with Babylonia. This is the burden of an article in the third number of the *Quarterly Review* for 1882; but I have nothing to do with it in this paper, excepting as it finds a proof of the connexion which it affirms in the name of Hwang Tî,

* See *Chinese Researches*, by Thomas Fergusson, pp. 144, 145 (Shang-hái 1886).

about whom I have had occasion to speak so abundantly. "The mythical emperor, Hwang Tî," it is said, "may be identified with Na Khunta, who, according to the Susian Texts, was the chief of the gods. Among the ancient Chinese, Hwang Tî was known as Kon Tî, and his distinctive name is given as *Nak*. In some of the dictionaries of the older forms of the characters, these two names are represented in one group of characters which are to be read Nak-kon-tî. This resemblance of name is sufficiently striking" And, again, "Chinese records speak of Nai-hwang-tî, *i.e.*, Nakhonti."

Such is the proof. It is not worth while to controvert the metamorphosis of the modern sounds *Hwang Tî* into Kon-tî or Khun-ta; but the assertion that the distinctive name of the personage was *Nak* is amusingly wrong. His distinctive appellation was *Yü Hsiung shih*, meaning "the possessor or Lord of Hsiung," Hsiung being the name of the territory or principality which he originally held by descent. The other assertion, that in some dictionaries he appears under the style of *Hsiung Hwang Tî*, is equally baseless, and evidently made by the writer to support his argument. He appears, indeed, as *Yü Hsiung Hwang Tî*, the *shih* being dropped, but never the initial *Yü*. The *Hsiung*, it is contended by those who deal in the restoration of the old sounds, was pronounced *Hiong*. But where did the writer get the transmutation of it into *Nai* and *Nak*? This seemed to me to verge on literary dishonesty, till I happened to look one day into the Chinese chronological tables of the late Mr. Mayers, where I found that he, giving the Chinese characters correctly, yet transliterated the distinctive or personal appellation by *Yü Nai Shih*. That he, a competent scholar and careful writer, should write *nai* instead of *hsiung* is a remarkable instance of the *humana incuria*. The writer in the *Quarterly Review* probably never looked at the Chinese character, and no doubt thought that its sound was correctly transliterated by *nai*. There being in *Yü Hsiung* neither an initial n nor an â, the identification of Hwang Tî with Nak-hunta of course passes away like the baseless fabric of a vision.

According to Canon Rawlinson in his *Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World*, Nakhunta, or in full Kudur-Nakhunta, was the first of the Elamite Kings, who constitute the first historical dynasty of Chaldea, commencing in B.C. 2286. He says that the meaning of Kudur-Nakhunta is thought to be the exact equivalent of that of the name

Zoroaster! That may be, or may not be; but I am sure that the man and the name had nothing to do with Yü Hsiung Hwang Tî, the legendary sovereign of China.

Conclusion.

20. On the cycle of China, I have nothing more to say that bears on the chronology of the nation. I cannot account for its origin, nor give the name of its inventor, nor say when the use of it began. I cannot account for the temporary appearance of the barbarous names employed by Sze-mâ Ch'ien and a few others in lieu of its simple terms. Light may come to us on some of these points by and by. But the conclusions which I have sought to set forth are independent of all theories about the cycle. The era of Kung-Ho in B.C. 842 is sufficiently established by astronomical calculation and certain historical notices. From that date we go back, feeling our way slowly and as surely as we can, along the course of time for about 2,000 years more, and then all light of history fails us. The facts of the language convince us that there were men in China, communities of men long before that date, but we can say nothing further about them.

Canon Rawlinson has done his best to describe the five great monarchies of the ancient Eastern world. We are gradually becoming aware that there was a sixth Eastern monarchy greater than any of his five;—the monarchy of China, which probably preceded them, and certainly outlived them; and which still lives on, a modern monarchy as well, showing comparatively few signs of decay, with hardly a wrinkle on its brow! I cannot but hope that there is a future before it, compared with which its long past history shall not be worthy to come into mind.

The PRESIDENT (Sir G. G. Stokes, P.R.S.)—I will ask you in the first instance to return thanks to Professor Legge for his very elaborate and interesting paper (applause). As there are some present conversant with the subject, perhaps they will favour us with their remarks.*

* A brief letter was received from Professor T. de Lacouperie, expressing his dissent from Professor Legge's statement in Section 19—that 'Hwang Tî is not to be identified with the Babylonian Nakhunta.'

Sir THOMAS F. WADE, G.C.M.G.—I have very little, in fact nothing, to add that directly bears on the subject of the chronology of China. I have naturally been, to a certain extent, a student of its history, and have had to pay attention to its chronology subsidiarily; but I am not in possession of anything by which I could attempt to modify or verify a statement of Professor Legge's. There is one point which I think worth mentioning as due to a man who is gone from amongst us, which may be the probable cause of a mistake in Mayers' chronology. Every Chinese student must be sensible of the very great service that he has rendered by the execution of that very valuable little work. It was printed for him a thousand miles away, and he complained to me very bitterly of the number of errors both in English and Chinese in the subject-matter of his work.

As regards the subject-matter of the paper to which we have listened with so much interest, I think everyone who examines Chinese history at all must be struck, not with the difficulties he has to face in respect of the antiquity of Chinese history, but with the astonishing absence of incidents which we might be inclined to doubt. There seems to be no question as to the trustworthiness of Chinese Chronology from the Han dynasty, 206 B.C., and I think when we read through those ancient records that Confucius had before him, and from which he learnt the history of his country, we must be struck with this—that notwithstanding the extraordinary length of the three dynasties presented to us, the incidents that are recorded are very rarely, if ever, incredible. The ages assigned to the individual men are to us, who believe in the patriarchal ages, in no instance astonishing. I think it is impossible to doubt, as Professor Legge suggests, that Fu Hsi, Shǎu Náng, and Hwang Tì were real personages, and that we have their histories, as governors and teachers, before us in one of the most ancient chronicles in the world, known as the Shih Chì. I think I should go further than Professor Legge has gone into a belief in the existence of historiographers in very ancient times, and it is very interesting to observe that in their relations to the government, in the acts they recorded, they stood very much as the prophets of Israel did. They were not only mere recorders of what passed, but they were the mentors of the sovereign, continually recalling to him that this act or the other was in defiance—I will not say of God, for I do not find in Chinese literature that they

were acquainted with God, as I am in the habit of using the word—but in defiance of a supreme Being whose will they believed it to be their duty to obey; and I think the most interesting consideration, although it is outside this immediate question, which presents itself to any student of that ancient history, and I might say of the modern history almost of our own time, is this: that throughout, more particularly in the ancient books, the object of the historiographers appears to have been not so much to recall the facts, but to impress on small Chinese communities that were increasing, that these facts were recorded for a moral purpose, partly to impress on governors their duty to the people, and on governors and governed that Heaven was in it all, that their success and prosperity were accorded to them in proportion as they obeyed the will of Heaven, and that misfortunes and evil were due to their departure from what they knew to be the will of Heaven. I think we find this lesson, with a certain continuity, throughout the ancient books to the days of Confucius; and with the days of Confucius we have this sentiment put forward in the very few treatises that are supposed to have come from his hand, and continually occurring in the utterances of members of that school that has existed to the days in which we live. I am very sorry to be unable to add more.

Dr. C. COLLINGWOOD.—On Chinese subjects we know Professor Legge is *facile princeps*, and perhaps there is no one who is so well able to write so interesting and instructive a paper as we have heard; I am anxious to make an inquiry, the reply to which would, doubtless, gratify others who, like myself, feel an interest in the matter. I have been very desirous to know what is the earliest date of authentic chronology in China. It appears that up to about 842 B.C. is tolerably well authenticated, and that there is good reason for believing, to a certain extent, in history which was written up to 2000 or 2200 years B.C.; but one can easily believe that beyond that there is nothing but a shadow of history, and that it then verges into fable, as do all historical records except, perhaps, those of the Bible; but I would ask Professor Legge what is the earliest known MS. in which these histories are found, and whether in those very early MSS. the characters employed are the same, or nearly the same, as those which are used at the present day. Of course we are all aware that in a spoken language there are a vast number of dialects—

for instance in the Pescadore Islands, which I visited, the islanders could not understand ordinary Chinese; and when I have travelled elsewhere I have found the same thing much nearer the centre of China itself.

The AUTHOR.—In China we have certain monuments going back before the Christian era, but the inscriptions are very short. We have not very old manuscripts in China, but we have some very old manuscripts and written characters, such as you would see in some parts of my paper, being engraved on stone, that is, cut into the stone. In our second century, about A.D. 180, an officer of the government was appointed by the reigning emperor to have cut in large tablets of stone all the characters in all the classical writings, and they were cut there and set up in the capital near the Temple of Confucius. It might have been supposed that these stone tablets would have remained, and yet there are only fragments of them now at the enclosure called "the Forest of Pencils" in the West of China, in the City of Ch'ang-an; but early in the ninth century another set of stone tablets was engraved and set up in front of or near the Palace during the T'ang dynasty, and all these tablets remain in that enclosure to the present day, and copies of them are being taken every day in the year, so that in those manuscripts it is just as if some writer were to find complete copies or records of the Old and New Testaments, going back, in the first place, to the ninth century, and then fragments of one equally complete that went back to our second century. Then there are fragments of monuments of later date cut here and there in Chinese. There are some stone tablets in Peking supposed to contain certain verses in poetry made in the eighth or ninth century before our era. Paper was not made until after the beginning of our era; before then the characters were written, now painted, now perforated, on bamboo and slips of wood. I am very happy that Sir Thomas Wade had no serious objections to urge to any of the statements that I have made in my paper. There is not a single statement in it that I have not investigated for myself and pored over again and again, and we go back, as I have said, with some sort of written authority, to the twenty-fourth century B.C., and we learn there that there must have been men and governments and written laws long before that, but how long we cannot say.

Dr. COLLINGWOOD.—May I add one other question. You say that your copy of these books of Record consist of seventy-three

large volumes. May I ask in how many of these books the examinations are conducted which have so great an influence on Chinese official advancement ?

The AUTHOR.—The examinations have always existed in China from nearly 1000 B.C., but the system of competitive examination was not fully organised until the seventh century of our Christian Era, and embraces all the classical books.

The Rev. F. A. WALKER, D.D.—Is it true that all the historical records connected with Confucius perished, as stated in the public press in England ?

The AUTHOR.—They did not all perish, but the destruction was no doubt very considerable. It was just as if any of the palaces of our great noblemen were burnt down, which would not affect the archives of Great Britain. I myself went over that residence of Confucius about seventeen years ago, and saw a great many things that no doubt are not to be seen there now ; but the fire was nothing like a complete destruction of the works of Confucius. Suppose the establishment of the Bible Society here were to be burnt down, still Bibles would not be burnt out of England ; we should have them everywhere.

Mr. R. C. ASHBY.—May I ask if there still exist any known samples of the knotted cords by which the records were kept ?

The AUTHOR.—No, none.

Mr. ASHBY.—Is there any known system extant of these knotted cords ?

The AUTHOR.—No, they have great difficulty in telling us what they were, and we might not be willing to believe in their existence until we turn to the accounts of the first discoverers of Mexico. There the quippos were found by the Spanish invaders to have been used for chronological record by the Mexicans. This seems to have been the way of keeping the records in China, but you must go back for it, according to the Chinese accounts, to about 4000 B.C. or more.

The Meeting then adjourned.