

RECOLLECTIONS OF A JOURNEY

THROUGH

TARTARY, THIBET, AND CHINA,

DURING THE YEARS

1844, 1845, AND 1846.

BY M. HUC,

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A CONDENSED TRANSLATION

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PREFACE OF THE TRANSLATOR.

A WORK, whose origin and purpose are explained almost in the first page, would scarcely require any introductory remark, but that it has been found necessary to reduce a little its original dimensions, in order to bring it within the limits of the present publication. Care has been taken, however, that the passages omitted should be those which it is believed the reader would most willingly spare; for instance, a general survey of the Tartar nation, derived, in a great measure, from written and even printed sources,—the account of the return journey from the capital of Thibet, the journey *to* which by a similar route, had been already fully described,—and some details concerning Buddhism, which have been already brought before the public, at length, in the work of Mr. Prinsep.

Protestant readers will not enter into all M. Huc's views on the subject of the conversion of the Buddhist Tartars, and they may, perhaps, think his frequent assertions of the striking resemblance between the outward forms and ceremonies of Buddhism and those of his own Church somewhat *naïve*; but his single mindedness and earnest piety of heart and life will, it is hoped, not fail to meet with sympathy from all Christians, whatever may be their speculative differences.

Some readers will be tempted to smile at the good faith with which he relates certain marvellous stories; and I must own that, having omissions to make, I felt at first tempted to include these among them; but, on consideration, it appeared better to leave them as they stand, since the manner in which they are related is characteristic of the unworldly simplicity, which is as striking as the intelligence of the writer. It is evident that, so far from tending

to impeach his veracity, they afford a strong confirmation of it; for he himself is perfectly aware of the feeling with which they are likely to be received, yet he will not shrink from the statement of what he believes to be the truth, nor from expressing opinions which, looking at these things from his peculiar point of view, he could not help forming. We may have no doubt whatever of the facts, but decline accepting his inferences from them; even while confessing our inability to offer any solution of our own. Perhaps all readers may not be inclined to regard them with so little attention; for, in the oscillation of opinion that may be observed on many such subjects, there appears an occasional tendency at present, not so much to the unconditional rejection as to the over-ready acceptance of whatever bears the impress of the marvellous; a desire to seize on it in support of theories which draw as largely on credulity as ever did tale of goblin or saintly miracle in old times. But the explanations offered on these systems are not much more satisfactory than that of the lady we have somewhere heard of who got over every knotty point in mechanics, by supposing a thing could be done "somehow by means of a screw."

We must be content to remain in doubt as to the precise mode of jugglery by which the "Lama Bokte" — after, to the satisfaction of all beholders, ripping his entrails open with a cutlass — restored himself to perfect soundness a moment after; but we must decline to admit that he effected it by preternatural agency. While we bow with reverence before the mysteries of the invisible world, we may maintain the rights of the understanding within its limited sphere, and not believe that the great laws, on whose unvarying stability the education of the human race, and our individual sanity depend, would be broken through on so many occasions, and for purposes so trivial.

I have alluded to what may be considered the weak points of the author: the charms of his picturesque narrative of personal adventure, in remote regions where scarcely a European foot has ever trod, have been already too widely appreciated to need any remark.

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