

THE BREADTH OF BUDDHISM.

BY TEITARO SUZUKI.

BUDDHISM is more intellectual, though on this account by no means less religious, than any other religion, and faith and knowledge are intimately interrelated and equally emphasised. Observe how Buddha exercised the ten virtues (Pâramitâs) in his previous lives as well as in his last existence, to attain perfect enlightenment; observe how he discussed all those great philosophical problems with Brahman sages, which have been puzzling mankind ever since the dawn of intellectual thought. The intellectuality of Buddhism has contributed much to the peculiar fascination that it exercises on speculative minds.

One of the practical results of the philosophical tendency in Buddhism is the predominance of a spirit of tolerance towards its opponents. It is the pride and glory of the followers of Çâkyamuni that its development and propagation among one third of the world's population took place without bloodshed, burning at the stake, or any other of the cruel methods which were committed by other religions in the name of God and from the sheer love and zeal of saving souls. Whenever it was necessary to overcome opposition, Buddhism used the peaceful method of persuasion by argument. Tradition tells us how brilliantly Âryadeva, the eminent and talented disciple of Nâgârjuna, achieved a victory over thousands of tîrthakas, simply by his superior dialectics and ingenious logic.

Buddhism thus calmly and patiently found its way from the East to the West, but never assumed a hostile attitude towards those religious and ethical systems which were already established. It adapted itself to new conditions and assimilated at the same time other views, so that the people could understand the new truths without experiencing any feeling of repugnance. Every nation has its peculiar needs, inclinations, and traditions which, however superstitious they may appear at first glance, contain some germs of

truth and should for that reason be respected. Buddhism always endeavors to point out those germs of truth, to nourish them, and to give them a new and better interpretation. Being more speculative than any other vehicle of salvation, Buddhism is less aggressive and less impassioned, and does not decry others as false, infidel, perfidious, and idol-worshipping, or apply other offensive epithets which are indifferently used by those pious propagandists who I fear love God too much and their fellow beings too little.

So when Buddhism was introduced into China officially (67 A. D.), it did not try either to suppress the mystic Taoism or the utilitarian Confucianism, although the transplantation of Buddhism into a climate profusely impregnated with practicality and optimistic thought, must have at first excited a great commotion in the intellectual field. What a contrast between the highly abstract philosophy of the Mahâyâna and the positivistic ethical teaching of Confucius! Nevertheless Buddhists worked on, steadily and peacefully, side by side with the followers of Kun Fu Tze and Lao Tze, till Buddhism took root, and, starting a fresh development there, gave such a great impetus to Confucianism as to produce in it some deep thinkers, among whom the most noted were Luh Siang San, Chu Tze, and Wan Yang Ming.

In Japan we have a singular instance which characteristically illustrates the rather over-tolerant spirit of Buddhism, if such a term be allowable. The Japanese are a people in whose minds the idea of ancestor-worship is deeply imbued, partly I think because they were islanders secluded from intercourse with the world, and partly because there was not much intermixture of races in Japan. When a statue of Buddha and a few Sûtras were first presented to the Japanese court by a Korean king 552 A. D., some of the ministers declared that they had no need of worshipping a foreign god as they had their own divine ancestors. Buddhists, however, did not disparage the sacred traditions of the Japanese by proclaiming that they revered false gods; but at once made a practical application of one of their fundamental doctrines, to wit, the Jâtaka theory. All Japanese ancestor-gods were then transformed into Bodhisatvas, or Avatâras (=incarnations) of the primordial Buddha, who, divining the natural inclinations of the nation, assumed the forms of their gods. And thus Buddhism and Shintoism, which strictly speaking is not a religion, were reconciled, and cherished no enmity towards each other. How ingeniously they interpreted Shinto doctrines! And in doing this they were perfectly consistent and sincere.

Enlightened Buddhists in Japan are still of the same opinion when they say that they feel friendly towards Christianity, for Christ, its founder, is an Avatâra (= incarnation) of the Dharmakâya, just as is Buddha himself. Independently of the religious significance of this attitude, it seems to me that in making such a statement they are uttering what is probably the truth; namely, that Christ himself, or at least early Christianity, was influenced quite a little by Buddhism, whose missionary activities are to be found in the very cradle of Christianity and its vicinity, long before the establishment of the latter there. Granting that differentiation is a necessary product of different circumstances, we are confronted with many similarities, nay, I am tempted to say, we find almost the same things in Buddhism and Christianity regarding dogma and ritual, and considering that the Japanese Sukhâvatî sects and Chinese Tien Tai sect, Dhyâna sect, and others so very different from the Buddhist churches of Siam, Ceylon, and Burma, are all comprised under the general name of Buddhism; I then feel strongly inclined to assert that Christianity with all its Jewish, Greek, and Roman traditions may be a Buddhism so metamorphosed as to suit itself to the soil and climate of transplantation. The differences between the Sukhâvatî (Jôdô) and the Dhyâna (Jen) sects are greater than between the Sukhâvatî and the Protestant Christians or the Tien Tai and the Roman Catholics. Whether or not a future discovery of some historical facts concerning this point confirms this view, it matters little; theoretically it is absolutely true that Christianity and Buddhism, each in its own way, sprang out of the unfathomable depth of the human heart which is everywhere the same. Take away their prejudices, intellectual as well as historical, and we have the essence of religion in all its purity and magnificence.

What makes a religion assume false appearances and exposes it to the gross miscomprehension of unsympathetic critics, is its local coloring and the popular superstitions that are so easily mixed with its purer doctrines. Buddhism as a faith for the masses has suffered this fate. While intellectual minds earnestly study it in all its essentials and find satisfaction therein, uneducated people and ignorant priests busily occupy themselves in heaping up superstitions. But outsiders should not judge Buddhism from these excrescences, and when they discover superstitious practices should not forget the scientific spirit and ethical grandeur of pure Buddhism.