

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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Frontispiece. Widowed.

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and

The Idea of Evil

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妻の人軍 筆郎四國谷満

WIDOWED.

(After an oil painting by Kunishiro Mitsutani.)

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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AT THE BATTLE OF NAN-SHAN HILL.

BY THE RIGHT REV. SHAKU SOYEN.*

ALL that I can say is, "It beggars description!" Verily, it is the acme of brutality and recklessness conceived in this world of individualisation (*nâmarûpa*). Even the fight between the Asura and Sakrendra, the demons and the angels, witnessed by our Buddha, seems here to sink into insignificance.

As far as my unaided eye can see, nature around me is calm. The Tai-lien Bay to the left and the Kin-chou Bay to the right, both as tranquil as mirrors, and above us and over the Nan-Shan Hill, where directly in our front the Russian fortifications stand, the sky expands in majestic serenity. Nothing suggests the awful carnage which there is enacted. Guns roar, bombs burst, but we do not see whence they come, and their knell only offsets the solemnity of these peaceful surroundings. But when I look through a powerful field-glass, I behold the hillsides strewn with dead and wounded, and soldiers rush onward over these wretches, while the enemies on the hill are madly scrambling, stumbling, and falling. I shudder at the sight.

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Still more appalling is a visit to the battle-field after the fight. Yesterday, when I viewed Nan-Shan Hill from a distance, imagination lent enchantment to the spectacle, and at times the cannonade even impressed me with grandeur. But I am now confronting actualities,—actualities whose terror and horror can never be forgotten. From the top of yonder hill, where, under the calm summer sky, nature smiled in beauty, I could form no true conception of the tragedy, which, as I see now, took place here in unparalleled

* Translated by Teitaro Suzuki.

fury and madness. What a strange paradox is this contrast,—a most horrible catastrophe of human life happening in the most delightful surroundings! It makes me meditate again on the doctrine of our teacher.

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Buddhism provides us with two entrances through which we can reach the citadel of perfect truth. One is the gate of love (*karunâ*) and the other the gate of knowledge (*prajñâ*). The former leads us to the world of particulars and the latter to the realm of the absolute. By knowledge we aspire to reach the summit of spiritual enlightenment; by love we strive to rescue our fellow-creatures from misery and crime. View the vicissitudes of things from the unity and eternity of the religious standpoint, the Dhamadhatu, and everything is one, is on the same plane, and I learn to neglect the worldly distinction made between friend and foe, tragedy and comedy, war and peace, *samsâra* and *nirvâna*, passion (*kleṣa*) and enlightenment (*bodhi*). A philosophical calm pervades my soul and I feel the contentment of *Nirvâna*. For there is nothing as far as I can see, that does not reflect the glory of Buddha. Even in the midst of this transcendent universality, however, my heart aches with a pain, undefinable yet insuppressible. Love for all sentient beings asserts itself, and that frigid indifference of the intellect gives away.

And why was it necessary that the many horrors of this present war have come to pass? Why had those poor soldiers to sacrifice their lives? In every one of them a warm heart has been beating, and now they are all lying on the ground in piles, stiff and stark like logs.

O Mother Earth! All these my fellow-creatures, it is true, are made of the same stuff of which thou art made. But do not their lives partake of something not of the earth earthy, altogether unlike thyself, and, indeed, more than mere gross matter? Are theirs not precious human souls which can be engaged in the works of peace and enlightenment? Why art thou so gravely dumb, when thou art covered with things priceless that are being dissolved into their primitive elements?

In this world of particulars, the noblest and greatest thing one can achieve is to combat evil and bring it into complete subjection. The moral principle which guided the Buddha throughout his twelve years of preparation and in his forty-eight years of religious wanderings, and which pervades his whole doctrine, however varied it may be when practically applied, is nothing else than



THE RIGHT REV. SHAKU SOYEN.*

* The Right Rev. Shaku Soyen, the Lord Abbot of Engakuji, Kamakura, is one of the most prominent Buddhist prelates of Japan. He visited Chicago during the World's Fair and was a conspicuous member among the foreign delegates to the Parliament of Religions. During the last summer he ac-

the subjugation of evil. To destroy the ninety-eight major and eighty-four thousand minor evils, that are constantly tormenting human souls on this earth, was the guiding thought of the Buddha. Therefore, every follower of the Buddha builds the great boat of love, launches it on the great ocean of birth and death, steers it with the great rudder of faith, and sails forth with a steadfast mind through the whirling tempest of egotistic desires and passions. No Buddhist will ever relax his energy, until every one of his fellow-creatures be safely carried over to the other shore of perfect bliss.

War is an evil and a great one, indeed. But war against evils must be unflinchingly prosecuted till we attain the final aim. In the present hostilities in which Japan has entered with great reluctance, she pursues no egotistic purpose, but seeks the subjugation of evils hostile to civilisation, peace, and enlightenment. She deliberated long before she took up arms, as she was well aware of the magnitude and gravity of the undertaking. But the firm conviction of the justice of her cause has endowed her with an indomitable courage, and she is determined to carry the struggle to the bitter end.

Here is the price we must pay for our ideals—a price paid in streams of blood and by the sacrifice of many thousands of living bodies. However determined may be our resolution to crush evils, our hearts tremble at the sight of this appalling scene.

Alas! How much dearer is the price still going to be? What enormous losses are we going to suffer through the evil thoughts of our enemy, not to speak of the many injuries which our poor enemy himself will have to endure? All these miserable soldiers, individually harmless and innocent of the present war, are doomed to a death not only unnatural, but even inhuman!

Indeed, were it not for the doctrine of love taught by the Buddha, which should elevate every individual creature to the realm of a pure spirituality, we would, in the face of the terrible calamities that now befall us, be left to utter destruction and without any consolation whatever. Were it not for the belief that the bloom of truly spiritual light will, out of these mutilated, disfigured, and decomposing corpses, return with renewed splendor, we would not be

accompanied the army stationed before Port Arthur, Manchuria, where he was attached to the staff of H. R. H. Prince Fushimi. Having returned to Japan, he has published the impressions received on the battle-field in an article entitled "At the Battle of Nan-Shan Hill," and it will be interesting to our readers to become acquainted with the attitude of a representative Buddhist priest as to his opinion concerning war, especially the present war with Russia. The Right Rev. Shaku Soyen belongs to the Zen sect which is one of the strictest and most orthodox churches of Japan.

able to stand these heart-rending tribulations even for a moment. Were it not for the consolation that these sacrifices are not brought for an egotistic purpose, but are an inevitable step toward the final realisation of enlightenment, how could I, poor mortal, bear these experiences of a hell let loose on earth?

The body is but a vessel for something greater than itself. Individuality is but a husk containing something more permanent. Let us, then, though not without losing tenderness of heart, bravely confront our ordeal.

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I came here with a double purpose. I wished to have my faith tested by going through the greatest horrors of life, but I also wished to inspire, if I could, our valiant soldiers with the ennobling thoughts of the Buddha, so as to enable them to die on the battlefield with the confidence that the task in which they are engaged is great and noble. I wished to convince them of the truths that this war is not a mere slaughter of their fellow-beings, but that they are combatting an evil, and that, at the same time, corporeal annihilation rarely means a rebirth of soul, not in heaven, indeed, but here among ourselves. I believe I did my best to impress these ideas upon the soldiers' hearts; and my own sentiments I express in the following stanza, one of the many poems composed on the field of battle:

Here, marching on Nan-Shan,
 Storming its topmost crest,
 Have thousands of brave men
 With dragon valor pressed.
 Before the foe my heart
 Is calmed, composure-blessed.
 While belching cannons sing
 A lullaby of rest.