

THE MESSAGE OF BUDDHISM TO CHRISTIANITY.

BY THE EDITOR.

RELIGIONS are movements in the development of mankind which possess an individuality of their own. A religion grows and expands,—it sometimes decays and withers. There is a time in almost every religion in which it assimilates the truth wherever it finds it. At any rate it adopts those truths that are congenial to its own doctrines. When a religion has grown strong it frequently becomes intolerant and narrow. Kindred truths instead of being assimilated are persecuted and rejected because the truth itself is no longer insisted on but the formula in which it has been cast. This is the time of dogmatism and ecclesiasticism. The development of religions at present is not quite closed. Even the dominant faith of Europe and America is continually growing, changing, expanding, or perhaps also becoming narrower in certain quarters, and on meeting other religions it specifies or modifies its own tenets. The question of the survival of a religion is mainly based on its capability of growth, and this will be the test when Christianity meets with ethical religions of a different history such as Mazdaism and Buddhism. We do not hesitate to say that Buddhism is the most important rival of Christianity, for not only has it a hold on the greatest Asiatic nations, China and Japan, as well as Siam, Cochin China, and Korea, but has also (and this is perhaps of still greater significance) made inroads into Western countries. There are a goodly number of Buddhists now in Germany, France and the United States, and it is not without importance that it is mainly thinkers who are attracted by it.

One reason why Christianity loses ground in certain spheres, especially among intellectual and earnest people possessed of deep religious sentiment, is the spirit of dogmatism which still dominates almost all the Christian churches and prevents Christianity from

growing and expanding and from assimilating the truth that can be found in other quarters, especially in science and in the faith of a religion like Buddhism, based upon enlightenment.

The question whether Christianity will be able to resist these inroads depends entirely upon its ability to expand and grow. If Buddhism can accept all that is good and true in Christianity it will not only maintain itself in the long run, but outgrow Christianity in significance and power. But if the reverse takes place, if the leaders of Christian churches learn from Buddhism, they will have the advantage of introducing a new era in the history of Christianity, which will be an era in which religion and science would no longer be in conflict.

As an instance of how Buddhism develops and how it is represented in an ancient Buddhist country by one of the the leading clergymen of its faith, we call attention to a collection of sermons* preached by the Lord Abbot of Engakuji, Kamakura, Japan. We have here not a dogmatist and believer in certain formulas, but a philosopher and thinker whose reverential attitude makes him religious, and allows the religious sentiment to pervade his entire intellect, and yet he is Lord Abbot of a sect which is one of the oldest and most orthodox of Eastern Asia, the Zen sect, whose institutions are not unlike those of the Roman Catholic Church.

How true our comments are and how great the need is for Christianity to learn through Buddhism appears from an article in the *Biblical World* (August, 1906), written by Professor E. Washburn Hopkins, of Yale University, who can certainly not be suspected of making propaganda for Buddhism, for even in his article he speaks of it as an alien faith. If he, as a man of science, possesses a bias, it will certainly be in favor of the religion of his own country, but the more valuable is the warning which he expresses in his "Message of Buddhism to Christianity" from which the following quotations speak for themselves.

He says:

"Buddhism has much to learn from Christianity, but what Christianity may learn from Buddhism is that there are many whose emotion cannot be touched till the foundation of their formal religion is laid upon a sharply criticized belief. To win these, an ever-increasing number, Christianity must provide them a place. There will always be enough people to whom the scientific foundation of faith is not essential, or at least less essential than that side of

* *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot.* By the Rt. Rev. Soyen Shaku. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1906.

religion which appeals to feeling and rests upon faith. For these there is abundant provision in Christianity; and there should also be similar provision for those who would like to proclaim themselves Christians, but are debarred from the Church by its lack of full sympathy for liberal thought. Buddhism has never persecuted the adherents of another faith, and it has allowed free room for sectarian interpretation of its own creed. How radical is this attitude may be shown, not only by the philosophic attitude of Buddha himself, but by the edicts of the great emperor who in the third century before our era was converted to Buddhism and became the zealous upholder of the new faith.

"In Buddha's thought there is no incompatibility between the ethical ideal and that devotion to mental training which is prominent in early Buddhism, but is not regarded as a requisite in Christianity. Christianity seldom emphasizes, even when it permits, the utmost intellectual freedom, while Buddhism establishes the faith intellectually from the beginning. This insistence on enlightenment, the building of faith upon intellectual satisfaction, conveys a message to Christianity that cannot wisely be ignored. We may not be content with Buddha's philosophy—there is no reason why we should be; but we need the spirit which co-ordinates philosophy and religion, which admits no separation between science and faith. There are Christians who never correlate their science and religion, who keep their wisdom in one pocket and their faith in another; not to speak of those who look with suspicion on any attempt to regulate faith by science. There are no Buddhists of this sort, not because they have no philosophy or science, but because it is fundamental to their religion that it shall rest upon a correct view of life in general. The overthrow of traditional error is the first element in the religious life, as well as the first element in philosophical wisdom. Everything else, prior to this, only prepares one for the way of salvation. This is the corner-stone of Buddhism, intellectual conviction, as emotion has been said to be the corner-stone of Christianity. It is this which to-day is the attraction drawing intellectual converts away from Christianity to Buddhism. Nothing else of importance is urged by them. What appeals to those who in America and Europe have gone over to this alien faith is the trait of liberality and enlightenment. That the contrast is drawn between Buddhism at its best and Christianity at its worst must be admitted in the case of many of the converts, but the vital fact remains that there is no other religion in which there has been from the beginning

so great intellectual freedom. It is this freedom which thinking men are demanding to-day in Christianity."

The lesson which Professor Hopkins urges is that Christianity should encourage liberal thought, and he insists that this message is one of encouragement to those who believe in intellectual fearlessness, or to reprove those who would suppress critical examination of knowledge.

We repeat a sentiment which we have urged again and again and which we hope will be heeded by the leaders of the Christian faith.

Any faith that is irreconcilable with science is doomed. He who rejects science blights the life of religion. For the spirit of genuine religion is the same as the spirit of genuine science. Science is a divine revelation. Contempt for science and a deliberate suppression of reason is an intellectual sin; it is the sin against the spirit which cannot be forgiven, but must, if persisted in, ultimately lead to eternal perdition.

Professor Hopkins grants that Buddha "bids men be full of sympathy for all living things. 'As a mother guards her son,' it is said, 'with kindness without measure, impartial, without enmity, prevailing throughout the world,' so should the Buddhist guard all living beings." Nevertheless Professor Hopkins claims that "Nothing is farther from the Buddhist ideal than love with its Christian connotation." The practice of universal kindness is merely a religious exercise "to free one's mind of the fifth 'fetter,' ill-will. One sees that the words are correctly rendered, but the significance is deeper than the literal signification. The ideal is different. It is not devotion to the world that the Buddhist aims at; he is to free his mind of ill-will by trying to love the world, then by pitying it, then by calmly considering it with equanimity. To hate is wrong, but to love is also wrong."

That Professor Hopkins is not devoted to Buddhism appears from his conclusion, where he says: "It started as a religion without soul, without the ideal of self-sacrifice, and without God. At its best it was a society for ethical culture. As such it soon perished. What took its place in India and the farther East was a religion which exalted self-sacrifice and decried self-seeking, even in the nobler form, as it did materialism; a religion which virtually reinstated a belief in soul, and made of Buddha himself a divine being, upon whose love and pity man can depend, to whose heaven hereafter man may go.... There is revealed one clear fact, namely, that a living church must hold fast to the spiritual, to the very element which primitive Buddhism denied."