

MISCELLANEOUS.

MAHĀYĀNA DOCTRINE AND ART.¹

COMMENTS ON THE STORY "AMITABHA."

The story *Amitābha* is the third in a series of short tales explanatory of Buddhism. The first of them, *Karma*, treats of Buddhist ethics; the second, *Nirvāna*, of Buddhist psychology; and *Amitābha* is an exposition of Buddhist theology.



LOTUS DESIGN.

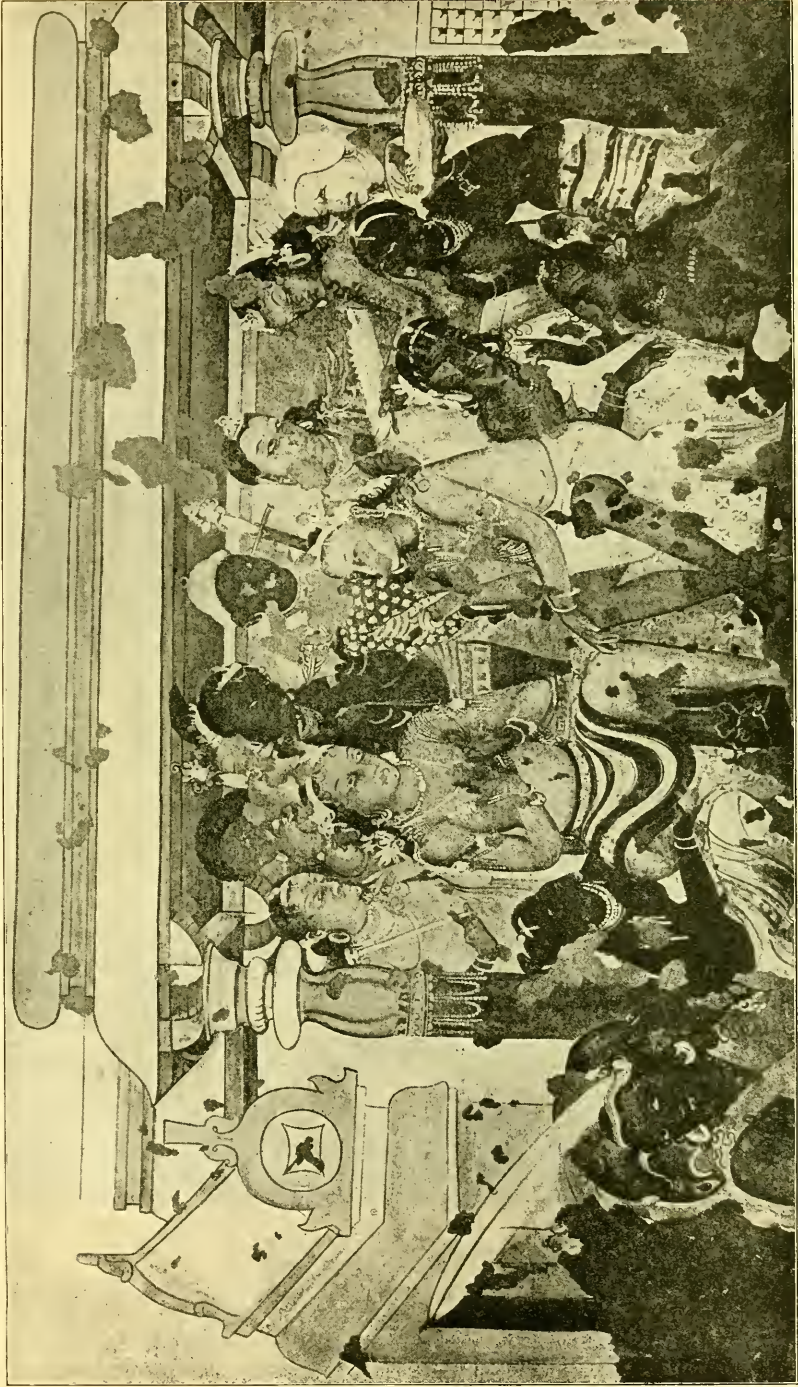
From Griffith's *Paintings in the Ajantā Caves*.

The original Buddhism omitted any allusion to God or other metaphysical conceptions; but in the further development of the Buddhist Church the meta-

¹The frontispiece and illustrations of this article represent scenes and pictures from the Ajantā caves which will be completed in the next number. They are the best monuments of Buddhist monastery life left in India of the period from 250 B. C. to 600 A. D., which is the age of our story *Amitābha*, viz., the period of the origin and completion of the Mahāyāna doctrine.

The frontispiece representing one of the chaityas, or churches, exhibits the art employed by the cave-builders to impress the worshipper or any person entering it with religious awe, and so predispose his mind for devotion. In one of the Buddhist chaityas (as mentioned by Fergusson) the light is concentrated upon a dagoba, the place where in Christian churches the altar stands, which has the peculiar effect of imparting to the spot a visible sanctification from above by a halo of rays of dimmed light.

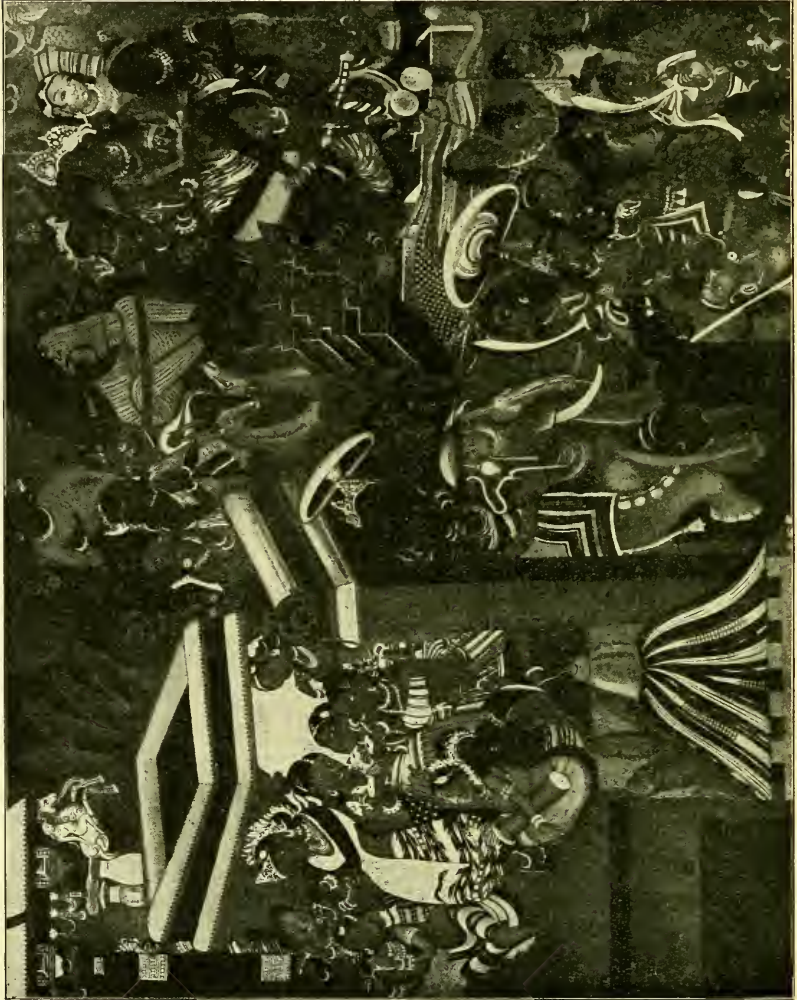
The frescoes on the walls represent scenes from the life of Buddha and from Jātaka tales, and from the inexhaustible treasury of Buddhist saint stories.



Fresco in the AJANTÂ CAVES. (It is interesting to notice that the sword-carrier wears a striped undergarment and a star-spangled upper garment. The stripes do not come out very well in the reproduction.)

physical question as to the ultimate condition of existence, and especially of the sources from which Buddhahood springs, became irrepressible and thus a new movement originated which is commonly called the school of Mahâyâna.

The Mahâyâna is not, properly speaking, a school but a church, or rather a doctrine which inspires all the Buddhist churches of the North; and the inventors



SIDDHÂRTHA, THE PRINCE, LEAVING THE PALACE BEFORE SEEING THE THREE EVILS OF LIFE.

of the term Mahâyâna designated the older churches of the South, now mainly represented in the Buddhism of Ceylon, as the Hînayâna.

Mahâyâna means "the large vessel," viz., a great ship in which multitudes may cross the ocean of Samsara, the restlessness of the world; while Hînayâna means "the small vessel," viz., a little boat in which only one single man can attain to Nirvâna. The Mahâyâna is a natural development of Buddhism, and is

practically implied in the original doctrines of Buddha. The contrast between Mahâyâna and Hīnayâna is not so great as it may appear, for the metaphysical ideas which are expounded in the Mahâyâna philosophy are ultimately based upon traditions which go back to original sayings of Buddha himself.

The doctrine of Amitabha, i. e., of the source of Buddhahood as an eternal principle, is expressed in a passage of the *Diamond Cutter*, where the nature of the



Buddha.

Bodhisattva Samanta Bhadra,
Representing the principle
of particularity or
love.

Ânanda.

Bodhisattva Mañjuçrī,
Representing the principle
of universality or
wisdom.

Mahākāçyapa.

A TYPICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE MAHÂYÂNA FAITH.

Buddha is explained to be incorporeal and spiritual. Buddha cannot be seen with bodily eyes, for they have the body of the law (*Dharmakâya*, chapter xxvi.) and further the name *Tathâgata* (i. e., the Perfect One) is justified because Buddhas have attained the state of the uncreate, the no-origin. They have become identi-

cal with suchness (the highest formative law) and possess no qualities of particularity or thisness, viz., material existence. We read in chapter XVII.:

"And why, O Subhûti, the name of Tathâgata? It expresses true suchness. And why Tathâgata, O Subhûti? It expresses that he has no origin. And why Tathâgata, O Subhûti? It expresses the destruction of all qualities. And why Tathâgata, O Subhûti? It expresses one who had no origin whatever. And why this? Because, O Subhûti, no-origin is the highest goal."¹

The philosopher of the Mahâyâna is Açvaghosha. The tendency and perhaps the word also existed before him, but he is the great systematiser who formulated it, and he left a little treatise entitled *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna*. The original Sanscrit text of this small but important book has been lost, and it has been preserved only in two Chinese translations which have for the first time been translated into English by Teitaro Suzuki, and published by The Open Court Publishing Company in 1900.

The philosophy in the Mahâyâna is represented in a picture which has become typical of Northern Buddhism. Buddha is seated on a lotus throne in the attitude of teaching, with particularity on his right side, and wisdom, the principle of universality, on his left. The former is personified in Bodhisatva Samanta Bhadra, riding a white elephant, and the latter in Bodhisatva Mañjuçri, riding a lion. The group is completed by the presence of Ânanda, the disciple of love, and Kaçyapa, the disciple of wisdom, equipped with his begging bowl.

P. C.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]

SECRECY IN RELIGION.

"I am the doubter and the doubt;
and I the hymn the Brahmin sings."

The following supplementary notes may be of interest to the readers of *The Open Court* in connection with the Gayatri.²

I asked Count De Gubernatis as we were looking at the wonders of the Musée Guimet on the occasion of the Congress of the History of Religions in Paris (September, 1900), whether now that all the sacred books had been translated and reproduced in European editions, there was still a prejudice against uttering the more sacred parts before a European. He answered with the following story: When he was on a visit to a native prince whose name I have forgotten, he expressed to the prime minister the desire to hear some verses recited in the peculiar immemorial measure used for them. The prime minister readily assented and arranged a meeting with certain Brahmans whose particular business it was to study and transmit the proper articulation of the Scriptures. On the appointed day, Count De Gubernatis, the prime minister, and three or four Brahmans accordingly assembled. Two or three of the Brahmans proceeded to repeat their verses without hesitation; they were the reciters of the later sacred books. But when it came to the earliest Vedas, the Brahman whose study these were, positively declined to utter a word; to do so, he said, would be sacrilege. In order to persuade him Count De Gubernatis himself repeated the hymn to the sun, to show him that he was already familiar with the sense. But to no avail. The sacred mystery dwelt

¹ The original Sanscrit text is published in *Buddhist Texts from Japan*, edited by F. Max Müller, Oxford, Clarendon Press. Our passage, quoted from the *Vagra Kkhedikâ*, chap. XVII., will be found on p. 37. For a translation see *S. B. of the E.*, XLIX., part II., p. 133.

² See *The Open Court* for February 1902, p. 97.