

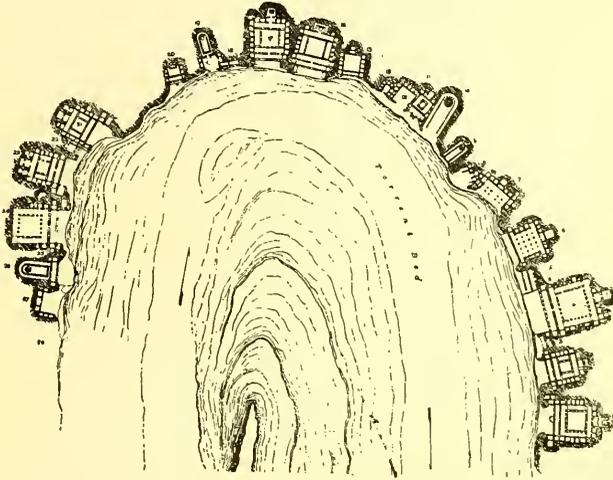
MISCELLANEOUS.

MAHÂYÂNA DOCTRINE AND ART.

COMMENTS ON THE STORY "AMITABHA." ¹

(CONCLUDED.)

The story *Amitâbha* characterises that phase in the development of Buddhism which may be called "the rise of the Mahâyâna," or "the origin of Buddhist theology." The age in which this process took place is the beginning of the Christian era, and the main events of our story are based upon historical traditions.



THE GENERAL PLAN OF THE AJANTÂ CAVES.

The philosophy of the Mahâyâna which finds expression in the philosophy of Aṅvaghosha may be regarded as orthodox Buddhist metaphysics. King Kanishka is a historical personality. His war against Magadha is mentioned in the *Records of the Western World*, written by the Chinese pilgrim Hsüen Tsang. The conditions of peace imposed upon the king of Magadha are related in our story exactly as they are mentioned by this Chinese author.

¹ See *The Open Court* for July, August, September.

The monastic life described in the first, second, and fifth chapters of the story *Amitâbha* is a faithful portrayal of the historical conditions of the age. The admission and ordination of monks (in Pâli called Pabbajja and Upasampada) and the confession ceremony (in Pâli called Uposatha) are based upon accounts of the Mahâvagga, the former in the first, the latter in the second, Khandaka (cf. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XIII.).



A MOTHER LEADING HER CHILD TO BUDDHA.
(Ajanta caves.)

Kevaddha's humorous story of Brahma (as told in *The Open Court*, No. 554, pp. 423-427) is an abbreviated account of an ancient Pâli text. The verses as well as Brahma's speech and most of the other details are all but literally translated. (Cf. Warren, *Buddhism in Translation*, § 67.)

The period of transition from the old Buddhism to the Mahâyâna is repre-



THE CALF-BEARING HERMES.
Archaic Prototype. (From Baumeister,
Denkm. des cl. Alt.)



A CHILD OFFERING GIFTS
TO BUDDHA.
(Fresco in the Ajanta caves.¹)



THE GOOD SHEPHERD OF THE
LATERAN.²

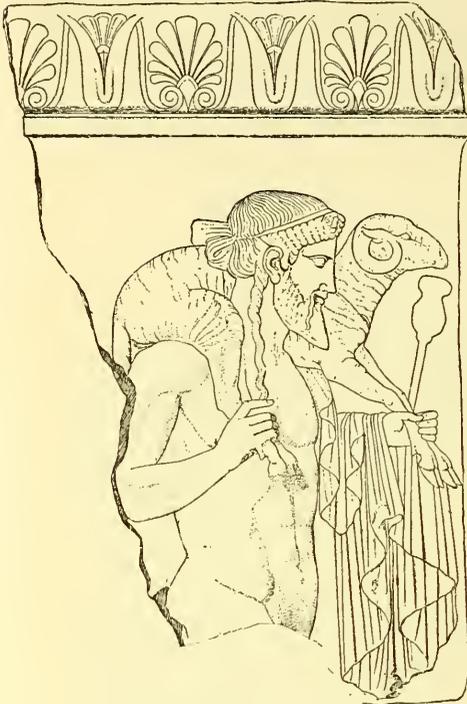


LAMB-BEARER IN THE
GANDHĀRA SCULPTURES.

¹ Reproduced from a photograph kindly lent me by Prof. Charles S. Lanman.

² From Kraus, *Geschichte der christlichen Kunst.*

sented by the "Milindapañha" (Questions of King Milinda), a famous treatise full of deep thought in which the Buddhist philosopher Nagasena discusses the several problems of psychology, philosophy, and ethics with the Greek King Menandros, or, as the Indians called him, Milinda. This Greek King lived in the second century before the Christian era and is known to have favored Buddhism. He, or kings of his line, seem to have encouraged Buddhist art, for Greek artists were imported into India to work out in marble the ideals of the new religion. Greek influence is especially noticeable in the formation of the face of Buddha, which (as Huc and Gabet remark) bears decidedly Western features, even in those regions of Thibet and Tartary where the artist never could have seen a European.



RAM-BEARING HERMES.

The Greek prototype of Christian and Buddhist Sculptures.¹

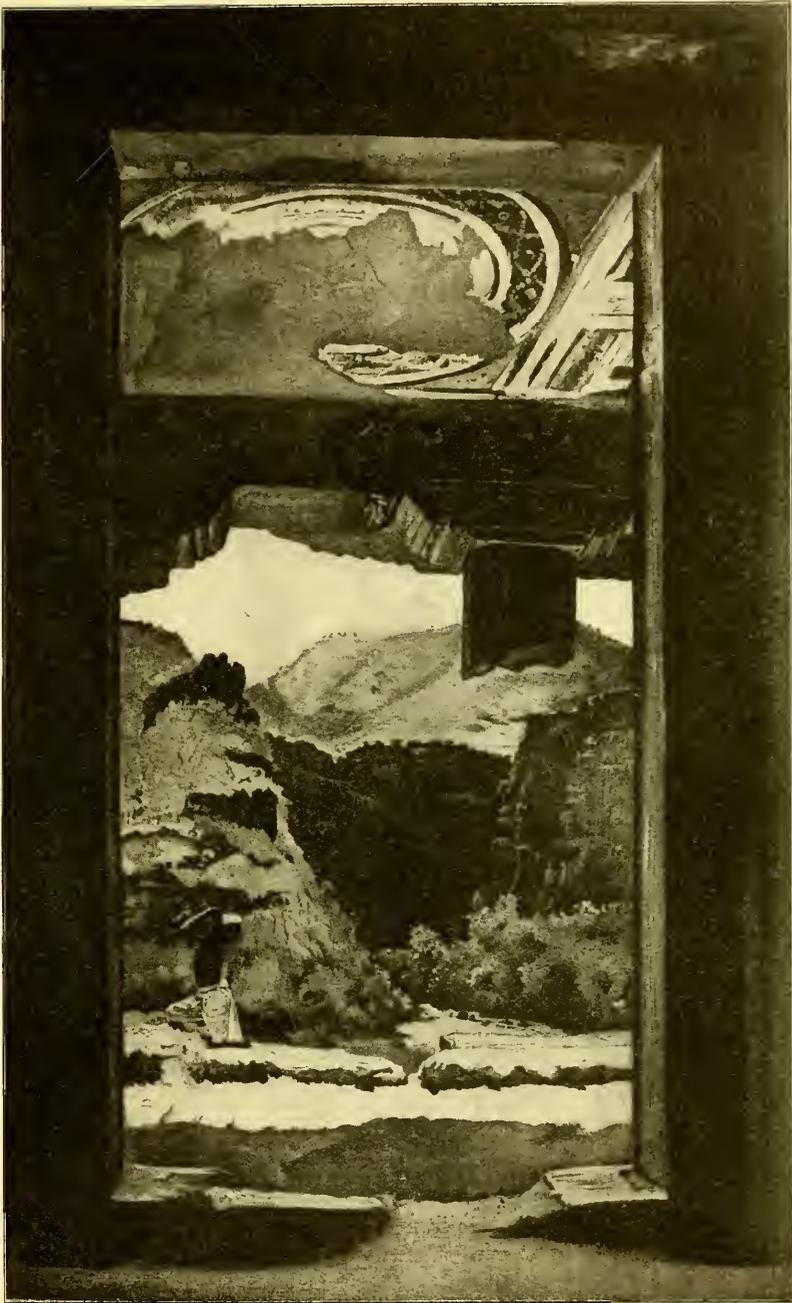
regarding both as chiseled after a common Greek model which must have been analogous to the *Hermes Kriophoros*.²

The Gandhāra sculptures presuppose in their turn an older school of painting of which little can be surmised and nothing is positively known; for the halo of the Gandhāra Buddha statues cannot (as Grünwedel has pointed out) have been invented by sculptors, but can only be considered as an imitation of a painted halo which is known to have been first used in the Alexandrian period as an attribute of the solar deities and luminary heroes of ancient Hellas.

Monasteries, such as the one which Charaka entered, were frequent in India, and the art of ornamenting them with statues and wall paintings is an obvious imitation of the Gandhāra style, showing traces of Greek influence. It cannot be accidental that the lamb-bearing Christ of the Lateran has an exact equivalent among the ancient Gandhāra sculptures which can scarcely be younger than the first century before the Christian era. We can only explain this striking similarity by

¹ For other illustrations in the same line see *The Open Court*, Vol. XI, pp. 710-730.

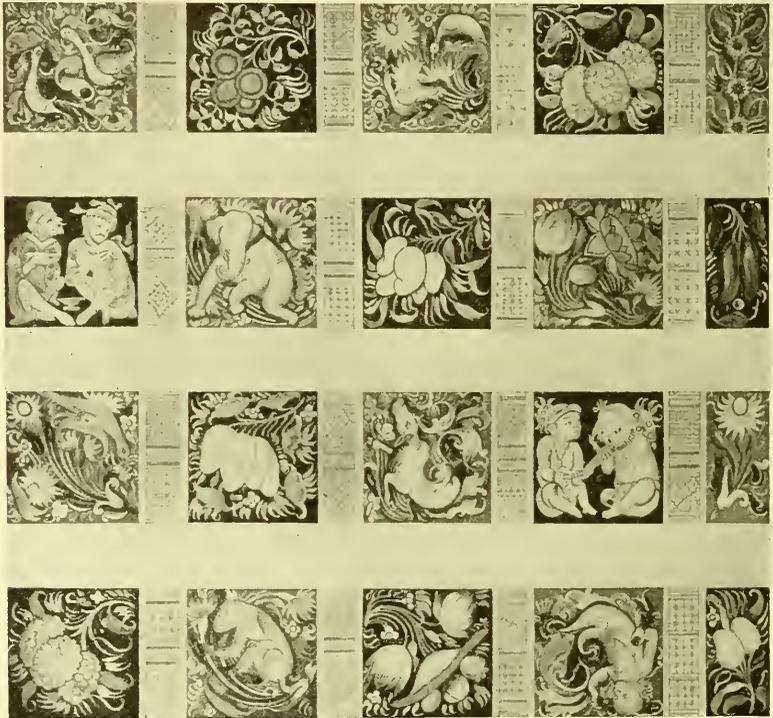
² For further details see *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien* (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1893), by Albert Grünwedel, who proves not only the Greek influence on the Gandhāra school, but also that the Greek artists must have found an Indian prototype of Buddha. They modified it, however, according to the notions of Greek art and modeled their conception of Buddha after the type of Apollo. The signs of Buddhahood on the Buddha statues (which are Hindu conceptions) are preserved, but modified when they would otherwise have an unartistic effect, especially the intelligence bump on Buddha's head which is covered with a Grecian knot after the Greek fashion of hair dressing at the time when first the original of the Apollo Belvedere was made.



VIEW FROM A GALLERY IN THE AJANTA CAVES.

There are ruins of many ancient Buddhist monasteries still preserved, all of the same style and inspired by Gandhâra prototypes, the best ones being the so-called cave temples of Ajantâ. They are much later than the Gandhâra sculptures and some of their ornaments may be as late as the sixth century.

We here reproduce a general map of the site of the place with its twenty-eight chaityas (i. e., churches or assembly rooms), surrounded by cells and having ornamental portals and verandas. They are fast falling into decay and only part of their wall decorations have been preserved in Griffith's valuable two-volume *édition de luxe*, from which we here reproduce a few of the most interesting pictures.



SAMPLE OF CEILING-DECORATIONS.
(Ajanta caves.)

The artistic work in the cave temples is most attractive, and, in spite of their shortcomings in perspective and other details of technique, decidedly superior to most Oriental work of a similar kind. Mr. Griffiths says:

"After years of careful study on the spot, I may be forgiven if I seem inclined to esteem the Ajantâ pictures too highly as art. In spite of its obvious limitations,

¹ Material in the same line, illustrations of Gandhâra sculptures, Christian representations of the Good Shepherd, etc., will be found in the author's article entitled "The Nativity, Similarities in Religious Art," published in *The Open Court*, Vol. XIII., No. 12, pp. 710-730.

¹ The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave Temples of Ajantâ, by John Griffiths. Made by order of the Secretary of State of India in Council. London, 1896.

I find the work so accomplished in execution, so consistent in convention, so vivacious and various in design, and full of such evident delight in beautiful form and color, that I cannot help ranking it with some of that early art which the world has agreed to praise in Italy.

THE TEMPTATION. (From Scenes in the Life of Buddha in the Ajanta caves.)



“Mr. Fergusson, who visited the caves in 1838–1839, wrote:

“The style of the paintings cannot, of course, bear comparison with European painting of the present day; but they are certainly superior to the style of

Europe during the age in which they were executed: the perspective, grouping, and details are better, and the story better told than in any painting anterior to Orcagna and Fiesole. The style, however, is not European, but more resembles



TYPES OF WORSHIPPERS.
(Ajanta caves.)



NOBLE WOMEN WITH FLOWER OFFERINGS.
(Ajanta caves.)

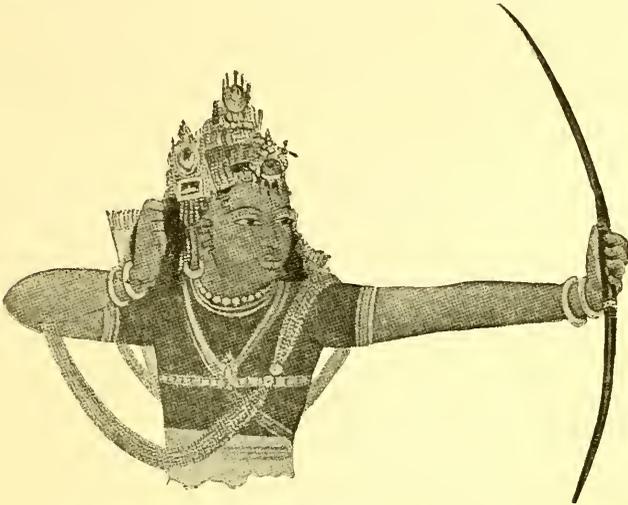
Chinese art, particularly in the flatness and want of shadow. I never, however, in China saw anything approaching its perfection.'

"With regard to the painted ornament, the same authority said:
" 'It is not at all unlike that still existing in the Baths of Titus.' "

As to the patience displayed in the excavation of these caves, Mr. Griffiths says:

"It is only when face to face with the basalt cliff, case-hardened at the time of the fiery birth, that a just appreciation of the enormous labor, skill, perseverance, and endurance that went to the excavation of these painted palaces can be formed. We are accustomed to associate a gentle and tranquil indolence with what we know of Buddhist creed. But here, at least, is evidence of a different range of qualities, combined with surprising boldness of conception, and a hardy defiance of difficulty foreign to our experience of modern Oriental character.

"Taking Cave 1 as an example, it may be possible by a mere enumeration of its dimensions to give some idea of the labor undertaken in only one—and that by no means the largest—of the series of excavations. They must have begun by marking out on the rock the width of the cave front, sixty-five feet, and then proceeded to cut away the face, leaving in the first place a projecting mass about fourteen



PRINCE SIDDHĀRTHA DISTINGUISHING HIMSELF IN MANLY EXERCISES.
(From the Ajanta caves.)

feet wide and nineteen feet high to form a porch, surmounted by an elaborately carved entablature and supported by two columns. The porch projected from a verandah formed of six columns and two pilasters with bracket capitals. This open verandah was ten feet from the front wall of the hall, which was pierced with three doors and two windows. The central door had an opening of five feet wide by ten feet high, and was richly carved. The great hall, nearly sixty-four feet square, with a colonnade of twenty pillars marking surrounding aisles ten feet in width, was next attacked. Then opening from the aisle, the numerous cells for the accommodation of the monks were excavated. Beyond the great hall was hewn an ante-chamber nineteen feet wide and twelve feet deep, with elaborately carved pillars and doorway leading still further into the sanctuary itself, where was fashioned a colossal statue of Buddha. By the time that this is reached a total depth of a hundred and twenty-one feet had been excavated."

Whatever we may think of Mr. Griffiths's estimate as to the artistic value of

the Ajantâ cave paintings, they reflect a noble and refined culture. Mr. Griffiths says:

"In striking contrast to most early Hindu work is the entire absence, not merely of obscenity, but of any suggestion of indecency or grossness. Modern England is perhaps somewhat eager to condemn the ancient fashion of regarding certain facts of humanity revealed in the sculptures of Hindu temples, but at Ajantâ there is absolutely nothing to shock the purist."

The purity and decency of Buddhism, the loftiness of its tone, is so unique that in this respect the Buddhist scriptures are superior to any other religious literature, the Bible not excepted. The artistic work of the cave temples proves that the purity of thought inculcated by Buddhism exercised its influence even upon the artist whose profession naturally inclines toward the sensuous.

The samples here reproduced from the specimens selected by Mr. Griffiths are considerably reduced and can give only an approximate idea of the originals; yet they will give a better description of the taste displayed in ancient Buddhist art than can be done in words, and may help our readers to form a vivid conception of the spirit of the age in which the Buddhist Mahâyâna prospered in India.

The decorations of the Ajantâ caves are an artistic expression of the moral loftiness of Buddhism, best characterised in the Dhammapâda, from which we translate stanza 183 in these lines:

"Commit no evil. But do good
And let thy heart be pure.
That is the gist of Buddhahood,
The lore that will endure."

P. C.

CONFERENCE OF THE ASIATIC CREEDS.

A religious conference of the Asiatic creeds will be held at Kioto, Japan, the middle of October next, under the name "Prajna Paramita Meeting." The tenor of the meeting will, as the name indicates, be Buddhistic, for *Prajna Paramita* is the title of a Buddhist canonical book which is considered as orthodox by almost all the Mahâyâna Churches. *Prajna Paramita* means "the perfection of intelligence," and among the many Paramitas, or virtues of the Buddha, the *Prajna Paramita* is his chief attribute. It has been personified as a kind of female deity, whose picture we published as a frontispiece to *The Open Court*, for June, 1901. She plays a similar part in Buddhist literature as *Sophia* or *Wisdom* plays in early Christian and Gnostic literature. She is the companion of the Buddha, privy to his councils in forming the creation. As such she is a kind of female counterpart of the eternal *Logos*.

The Buddhist canonical book entitled *Prajna Paramita* belongs to the Mahâyâna school; it is supposed to date back to the very beginning of Buddhism, and the followers of the Mahâyâna regard it as inspired. At any rate, the book dates back to the beginning of the Christian era, for in the second or third century after Christ *Nagarjuna*, a famous Buddhist philosopher, wrote a commentary to it which is still extant and regarded as orthodox.

The *Prajna Paramita* has been lost and forgotten in its original home India, but it is preserved in Nepal and also in Chinese and Thibetan translations. It has not yet been translated into English, but the contents are very similar to other Mahâyâna publications, some of which have been published in the *Sacred Books*