

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*

of the East, and the "Diamond Cutter"¹ is supposed to come closest to its philosophy, the underlying idea being that Buddha existed from the beginning as the primitive principle of the world to become incarnated in Gautama Siddhartha. Prajna Paramita, however, is the spirit (similar to the Christian Holy Ghost) through whom the world-formation takes place and in whom the divine dispensation of the course of events finds a representation.

At the Prajna Paramita Conference other Asiatic religions are welcome, and among them the Hindus of East India have been especially invited. Mr. Babu Norendronath Sen will be the authorised delegate of the Hindus, and he, although a Brahman, is for this occasion very probably the most appropriate representative of his country, for on several occasions he has exhibited his friendliness toward Buddhism; when the Maha Bodhi Society, on the full moon day of May, celebrated the Buddha's enlightenment, he presided over the meeting and made the following remarks: "We have no cause of quarrel with Buddhists. Let us be friends and brothers once more. The study of Buddha's life and teachings will do Hindus nothing but good. Considering the relations that obtained between them for many centuries, Hindus and Buddhists should try to be friends again. Hinduism and Buddhism remained side by side in peace and amity throughout India for several centuries."

ELISHA BEN ABUYA.

The Chicago Israelite with reference to the Rev. Bernard M. Kaplan's article² on the famous Jewish apostate Elisha Ben Abuya, surnamed Acher, says:

"Following the modern method of essay writing, and combining, as Rabbi Kaplan did, the historical and the romantic, I am rather surprised that he did not take advantage of the character of Elisha's daughter, mentioned in at least two places in the Talmud. I look for an amplification of this article by Rabbi Kaplan, or by some aspiring Zangwill, who is searching for rich and original material in Jewish folklore."

We agree with our contemporary that the character of Acher is an exceedingly good subject for a historical novel; but in calling attention to this tempting project we venture to state our own conception of the famous Jewish apostate. The strange fact that to his dying day he remained a friend of the greatest and most prominent rabbis of his age, in our opinion contradicts the statement made that he turned traitor to his own kin and served as a spy to the persecutors of his people. A man of his enormous learning cannot have been a vulgar criminal, nor if he remained in constant friendly contact with the leading men of his race, can he have been a traitor of Jewish tradition and nationality. The easiest explanation of the contradictory character seems to be that being a philosopher and probably a radical free thinker, he was hated and despised by the Jewish bigots who denounced him as an unbeliever, an atheist, and a traitor to Jewish tradition. We know very well how far the hatred went against Spinoza, and fanatics never distinguished between unbelief and crime. The suggestion that he would be capable of betraying his countrymen would easily change into an actual denunciation that he did it; and if Roman persecutors succeeded in discovering that the Jews continued in their Jewish habits and customs, they would naturally turn on him and declare that he had been the man who betrayed them. He may have had faults, he may even

¹ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIX.

² Published in *The Open Court* for August 1902 under the title "The Apostate of the Talmud."