

A JAPANESE WRITER'S HISTORY OF HIS THEOLOGY.

COMMUNICATED BY E. W. CLEMENT.

WHEN I was a boy there were few boys worse than I as far as downright mischief is concerned. I was fond of playing all sorts of pranks on passers-by. One of these was to put small snakes in a cake bag and then to throw down the bag for somebody to pick up while I watched from behind some obstacle. Many of my tricks were so bad that I expected the gods of whom I had heard so much would certainly punish me. As they did nothing, I at once began to doubt their existence. Shortly after this my grandmother, who belonged to the Nichiren sect, commenced to take me to hear sermons at the temple. At first I was greatly bored, but eventually got interested in all the preacher told us about the wonderful doings of Nichiren. I began to think that gods and divinities were real beings after all.

But having a practical mind, I decided that I would put this question to a fair test. We had an image of Nichiren in our house. So one day I removed this image from the altar and, taking it outside, submitted it to the greatest indignities possible. Subsequently I restored it to its place and waited to see what punishment I should get for this insult to the divinity. When nothing happened, I became more and more confirmed in the belief that no such beings as gods exist.

This was my state of mind when I gradually grew into manhood. I studied Chinese under a man who had very strong anti-foreign feelings, and being very susceptible to the influence of those with whom I associate, I gradually imbibed his views. Later when I commenced to study English, I regarded it as the language of a set of barbarians that was hardly worthy of serious attention. The man who taught me English had been the pastor of a church, and he

grew very fond of me and begged me to read the Bible. He gave me a copy, but I despised foreign things too much to even open it. Subsequently I was asked by this teacher whether I thought I could do my duty in the world unaided by a higher power. I felt then that I could not, but I knew that to say so was to acknowledge my need of divine assistance. This I did not want to do, so I left him without replying. I next came into contact with the Spencerianism of Toyama and Yatabe. Their arguments were welcomed by me as supporting my atheism. I thought then that I understood Spencer, but now I perceive this was only youthful conceit. At this time I commenced to lose my contempt for English and to study it with a will until I knew enough to read and understand pretty difficult works. Having reached that stage, I tackled the English translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. That book taught me much, but at the same time raised a number of new doubts in my mind. It will be remembered that Kant makes it quite plain that all attempts to prove the existence of a deity by speculative reasoning have signally failed. Whether God exists or not can not, according to him, be determined by reason. But while saying this Kant declares himself to be a believer in the existence of God. This dumfounded me. That a man like Kant should have been satisfied by the transcendental arguments whose inconclusiveness he takes such pains to show, or should have been able to rest his faith in the existence of God on any other satisfactory basis, is certainly surprising. His personal belief and his written arguments seemed to me to be irreconcilable with each other. But since a man of such enormous intellectual capacity as Kant was able to retain his belief, despite his failure to find for it a thoroughly rational basis, why should not I do the same?

With this feeling, I commenced to read the Christian Bible earnestly and accepted its transcendental teaching. "God's nature," I said, "is beyond our comprehension, but it is plain that God exists. Our conception of the world would be incomplete did we not predicate this existence." And so I passed from the stage of unconscious atheism to that of conscious theism. But, as you will see, I had not reached the end of my theological journey by any means. Though I accepted at this time the Christian conception of God, I joined no Christian church. I offered up no prayers. I sang no hymns of praise. To me there seemed to be an air of great hypocrisy about such Christian services as I attended. The words used by pastors in prayers often struck me as utterly silly. For instance, one pastor asks that God will grant special blessings to all assembled in his

church ; which is equivalent to asking an impartial deity to be pleased to stoop to favoritism. The words used in hymns did not seem to me to represent in the least the real feelings of the persons singing these hymns. Christian services impressed me badly, but they did not lead me to condemn Christianity altogether, as I felt then that the creed was better than the men and women who professed it. I even went so far as to defend Christianity against the attacks of certain conservative educationists (Dr. Inoue Tetsujirō and his fellow-thinkers). But as the years went by and my mind reached its maturity, I argued to myself thus :

In the opinion of the deepest thinkers that which is beneath the phenomena of the universe, call it what we may, clothe it with what attributes we may, is to us absolutely unknowable. What creeds like Christianity teach about God rests only on imagination. To say that God is capable of love or hatred, to supply the world with an exhaustive list of the traits he is supposed to have, does not help us at all to understand the real nature of God. This God of the religious is an invented God rather than a real one. If it be true that what is known as the real substance of the universe is God, and that real substance has an actual existence, it is quite plain that we finite beings whose intelligence is of a comparatively low order can never know God. So I come to the conclusion that there is no God that we can know. I am then an atheist in the sense that I can affirm that to us human beings no knowable God exists.

The stages of theological thought through which I have passed then are these : (1) I began with unconscious atheism. (2) I passed on to superstitious polytheism. (3) This drove me back to atheism of an arbitrary type. (4) Thence by the process described above I reached a stage of conscious monotheism. (5) But not finding any logical resting-place there, I passed on to conscious atheism. This is of course a contradiction in terms. Of the non-existence of God there can not possibly be any consciousness. As consciousness, after all, only embraces a very limited area and God may exist in the region beyond, to make consciousness or non-consciousness the test of his existence or non-existence is of course quite absurd.