

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES.

THE ESSENCE OF BUDDHISM. By P. Lakshmi Narasu. Madras: Srinivasa Varadachari & Co., 1907. Pp. xix, 212.

This book is an attempt by a Hindu man of science at a rationalistic interpretation of Buddhism rather than a traditional and conservative exposition of it. Though the author calls himself an humble disciple of the Master, he shows a great deal of independent judgment. He rejects in Buddhism what does not quite appeal to his scientific training, and upholds only those points which can be consistently maintained; and he rightly considers this attitude to be in perfect accord with the true spirit of the Buddha. For every Buddhist scholar of consequence has shown such a great regard for the general validity of ideas as to "not infrequently set aside the sutras, which are commonly regarded as the basis" of the Buddha's teachings. Thus Mr. Narasu may be said to have modernized his religion according to his own judgment.

The book is composed, the author says, of several essays on Buddhist subjects originally contributed to certain southern Indian magazines, and they are here organically arranged so as to make a serial reading. The subjects treated are: The Historic Buddha, The Rationality of Buddhism, The Morality of Buddhism, Buddhism and Caste, Woman in Buddhism, The Four Great Truths, Buddhism and Asceticism, Buddhism and Pessimism, The Noble Eightfold Path, The Riddle of the World, Personality, Death and After, and The Summum Bonum. The book as a whole is very readable.

The author thinks that "the marrow of civilized society is ethical and not metaphysical," and, in accordance with this view, he seems to be shy of deeply entering into the theological phase of Buddhism, which was developed by Açvaghosha, Nâgârjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, and others. He finds the essence of Buddhism in the so-called three "seals of Dharma," i. e., *anityâ*, *anâturata*, and *nirvâna*: that the universe is a perpetual flux of becoming, that there is no such thing as an ego-substratum, and that Nirvana is the attainment of perfect love and righteousness while negatively it is the extinction of lust, hatred, and ignorance.

Mr. Narasu's Buddhism is broad and liberal enough to include the conceptions of Dharmakâya, Amitâbha, and even of Sukhâvatî. Evidently, he must have read some of those books on the Mahâyâna Buddhism, which have been written mostly by Japanese scholars.

This book has a short introduction by Mr. Dharmapala who apparently does not subscribe to all of the author's statements concerning Buddhism as the latter views it from his "purely rationalistic" standpoint. But the reader with a fair, impartial mind will find it interesting to notice how many different shades of belief are included under Buddhism,—from a fantastic occultism of some theosophist to a rationalistic, positivistic interpretation of the non-atman theory of men of science.

The value of the book would have been increased if the author had traced every quotation to its source, and taken pains to supply a good index. D. T. S.