BUDDHIST MEDITATIONS.*

COMMUNICATED BY THE EDITOR.

THE Rev. A. Lloyd, lecturer in the Imperial University of Tokyo, President of the Asiatic Society of Japan, and formerly fellow at Peterhouse, Cambridge, has published several interesting books in which he contrasts Japanese Buddhism with Christianity. He has the religious zeal of a missionary, and his Christian piety is very sympathetic because it is unquestionably genuine. There is no attempt at misrepresenting Buddhism. On the contrary he exhibits a great admiration for the profundity of its doctrines, as well as the earnest spirit of its morality, but he points out in notes superadded to his explanations that Christianity is superior, and suggests that Christians ought to understand the spirit of the Buddha even better than Buddhists. We reproduce here a translation which Mr. Lloyd has made from a collection of a Buddhist book entitled Fukio Taikan, which seems to be a “general review of religious sermons.” It contains in poetic form a great number of maxims which are frequently used as texts for sermons in Buddhist temples. We omit the collection of such sayings as are commonly known through other Buddhist scriptures (collected by Mr. Lloyd on pages 67 to 82), and limit ourselves to the second instalment which contains verses of a typical Japanese interpretation of Buddhism. The form of these lines is what we might call blank verse. They are unrhymed and their poetry consists simply in the rhythm. Concerning the translation Mr. Lloyd says: “I have treated my Japanese originals with a very free hand, preserving indeed as far as possible the central thought and touch; but throwing literality to the winds, and in many places combining into one English poem the central thoughts of several Japanese ones.... And yet I believe that I have not often misinterpreted, however much I may have mistranslated.”

* Selected and translated from the Fukio Taikan, by the Rev. A. Lloyd.
The italicized headings are authors of the poems—in most cases emperors or famous heroes of Japan.

POETICAL MEDITATIONS.

H. M. the present Emperor.

On the cold winter nights I lay me down,
And feel the warm folds of my bed,—and then
My heart portrays the sufferings of the poor.

H. M. the present Empress.

The winter, with its rigors, touches not
Our bodies, clad in vestments warm and rich;
But when we think upon the shivering poor
That freeze in their thin rags, the cruel tooth
Of pitiless winter bites our inmost heart.

Nintoku.

From the high roof of my Imperial home
I look upon the city, and behold
The rising smoke from many a lowly hut,
And know that all is well within the land.

Tenchi.

The thatch upon the cottage is so thin
That the rain penetrates it, drop by drop,
And as he works the farmer's hand is wet.

Gotoba.

The night is cold, the mournful soughing wind
Howls through the chamber door, and then I know
How cold must be the cottage of the poor.

Godaigo.

My people's peace, the welfare of my land,
What an unending theme for thought is here!

Komei.

Perish my body 'neath the cold, clear wave
Of some dark well,—but let no foreign foot
Pollute the water with its presence here.
Kwazan-in.

The whole world is but Buddha: then to make
Distinction between high and low, or rich and poor,
'Twixt folk, and folk,—how great a sin this were.

Shujaku.

How profitless a thing is this same self,
That I should think of it! A few more months,
And lo! 'tis scattered to the winds that blow,
And all resolved into nothingness.

Gotaba.

The towering peak catches the rising sun,
And all men see it; but the dried-up stick,
That lies beneath the brushwood in the glen,
Escapes the ken of man.

Minamoto Sanetomo.

a The cold spring wind is fragrant with the scent
Of the first flowering plum, and, as it blows,
The fragrance lingers in my garment's fold.
b Some speak of Buddhas, some of countless gods;
What are they, but creations of the mind?
c Put not your trust in anything you see:
All that you see, hear, feel, is but a dream.
d Better a man confess his inmost sin,
Than build a holy Temple to the gods.
e The world's a dream, a cherry flow'r that blows,
And sheds its petal-snow, and is no more.
f Spring verges on to summer, and the bloom,
That pleased my eye in April, is no more.
g At midnight, in the glistening drops of dew,
That sparkle on the lotus-petal, see
The moon's bright face reflected wholly there.

Minamoto Toshiyori.

The moon, at early dawn, sinks in the West,
And all the world is bathed in silver light.
What glory can the Rising Sun bestow,
To perfect those pure beams?
Minamoto Iyetaka.

Oh fool! that, with misguided confidence,
Bragg'ist of to-morrow, and to-morrow's hopes!
To-morrow's hopes?—What are they but refrains
Still trembling in the air from yester-night?

Muso Kokushi.

a Where goes the flame when the too envious breath
Of heaven tears it from its burning wick?
Where, but to its first home, obscurity?
b The image thou beholdest in thy soul,
What is it but a trail of glory, brought
From some pre-natal life yon-side the womb?

Hideyoshi.

Life's but a dew that sparkles on the leaf,
And sparkling, melts—and all my mighty deeds
At Osaka are but as images
Reflected in the dewdrops,—dreams that pass,
With him that dreamed them, into nothingness.

Hideyoshi.

In stole and scarf, the counterfeited priests
Of this decadent age go round the streets,
Deceiving men with outward pomp and pride;
But, see, the fox peeps out beneath their robes.

Kōbō Daishi.

What human Voice can tell me 'this is good
For man to do,' or 'this is bad for thee?'
For human voice speaks as the heart doth think,
And in the heart is naught but constant change.
Ashishi to mo
Yoshi to mo ikani
Ji-hatesan:
Ori-ori kawaru
Hito no kokoro wo.

Hōnen Shōnin.

Why pray for length of years,—a life prolonged
To the full century? Lo! Mida's life
Is endless—and that endless life is thine.
Honen Shonin.
A hermit's cell, ... and by its lonely door
A formless mist ... but, by and by, the mist
Transmutes itself into the purple cloud
That forms the vestibule of Paradise.

Shinran Shonin.
Say not 'there'll be a morrow'; for to-night
The wind may rise, and ere the night is o'er,
The cherry flower lie scattered on the earth.

Ki Tsurayuki.
In my curved palm I hold a tiny drop
Of matter, where, for one brief space of time,
I see the moon's round face reflected.
    Such is life.

Sōjō Henjō.
The dewdrops fall on the broad lotus leaf,
Linger a little while, and then roll off,
One here, one there, and are not.
    Such is life.

Akasome-emon.
If I that sing am nought, and they that live
With me are nought, and nought the world I see:
How shall this nought hinder my mind to grasp
The sole true fact—Infinite Nothingness?

Kusunoki Masashige.
"Deep water and thin ice!"—the man that sees
This notice by the frozen lake, and still
Ventures upon the ice, call him a fool!

Jichin (Priest).
I live within material forms of flesh,
Yet when I was not, "Self" was ever there;
For "self" is Buddha.

[This poem should be contrasted with another stanza also contained in the Fukio Taikan, which reads as follows:]
"No moon is in the water
And all is but reflection.
Fools take the sheen for real
And think there is an ego."

*The bracketed passage is an editorial addition. Rev. A. Lloyd makes the following comment on the Buddhist doctrine concerning "self":

"This poem illustrates the Buddhist doctrine of the soul, as given in the Introduction. The "I" or "Ego," i.e., the soul of man, is born with man, and is at death dissolved. The "I" is nothing but a bundle of faculties, seeing, hearing, intuition, etc., kept together by the presence of "self." At birth these faculties come together, by means of the union of the bodily organs, and form a connecting link between the material body and "Self," which is Buddha (or God). At death, the "I" is dissolved, and only "Self" remains, conditioned by the fruits of deeds done in the body, but yearning to be absorbed in Buddha from whom it has emanated.

"Yet, in spite of this doctrine, Buddhists believe that Amida meets the faithful soul and conducts it to the Western Paradise, with its identity preserved through and beyond death. And every Japanese believes that the faithful dead revisit the earth at the Bon Festival, and that the brave dead still rejoice in the wars in which they lost their lives. A belief in the immortality of the soul is innate in the human mind."

The Buddhist doctrine is simple enough and yet it is difficult to grasp it, because it seems contradictory.

The Buddhist doctrine of the atman teaches that there is no atman, i.e., no self or ego, in the sense of a separate and immutable entity as taught in the Upanishads. The ego (or self) is a fleeting phenomenon and has no real existence, but the contents of the ego, man's ideas, his reason and his aspirations are the reflection of the law and order that governs the world, and so the reality reflected in the ego is immortal. The substance of the soul consists of rays that come from the eternal Buddha, also called Dharmakaya, the entirety of all laws, or Amitabha, the source of wisdom.

Since Buddhism does not believe in the existence of an atman as a distinct entity, it also rejects the Brahman doctrine of a transmigration of the soul. Yet Buddhists believe in immortality, for the same soul with its identical aspirations reappears in the coming generation. Briefly stated the Buddhist re-incarnation is by rebirth not by transmigration. For further details see The Dharma, p. 74 ff.
Umetsubo no Nyogyo.  Death.

At eve I hear the sad cicada sing
The knell of darkening days—a mournful song,—
In case no morrow’s dawn should break for me.

Ryōnen (Priest).

I gaze within, at my own heart, and see
The whole wide world, in brief, reflected there,
Each passion, pride, hope, fear, and burning lust:
And gazing, comprehend the ancient saw,
“Man is a mirror that reflects the world.”

Rengetsu.

All day the wind blows rustling through the pines,
And my dull ears heed not the wonted sound:
But when the rustling wind doth cease to blow,
My soul starts, conscious of a Something missed.

Abe Suruga no Kami.

“Thou hast a devil,” says my friend to me,
And I, indignantly, give him the lie.
But when my conscience whispers me and says,
“Thou hast a devil,” how can I retort?

To-a.

I stand upon the Unknown Ocean’s brink,
My long land-journey done, and, by the strand,
The good ship “Saving Faith” lies anchoring
To waft me, with fair tides and favoring gales,
To the Pure Land upon the other side.

Takeda Shingen.

We watch the changing phases of the moon,
From crescent back to crescent, and perchance
Think it has really changed.
’Tis thus the world
Fixes its gaze upon the transient show
And pomp of this material world of ours,
Nor heeds the unchanging Truth that dwells beneath.
Kūya.

In spring, the young colt gambols on the plain,
This way and that, nor heeds the rightful path,
Which only they can find who know the marks
That led them to the Way.

Dōgen.

a Only on some tall rock, that towers high
   Above the splash and turmoil of the waves
   Can I inscribe the Law....

b 'Tis something more,
   This Law, than the mere breath of spoken words:—
   Upon the Wayside grass it leaves no print
   To mark its passage....

c It is like a flower,
   Born in my own heart-land, and where it blooms,
   'Tis always spring for me....

d Whether in May,
   The flowers bloom, or in the summer brakes
   The cuckoo tunes his song, or autumn fields
   Are bright with silver moonlight, or the snow
   Lies deep on winter hills—'tis always spring
   In my heart-land, that has the Light within,
   And knows the Law....

e The darkly gathering night
   Falls fast with lowering clouds, yet through the gloom
   The fowl, unerring, finds its homeward way,
   Trailing across the sky a long, black line:
   So flies my soul back to its native rest,
   Deep in the mountain fastness—to itself.

Gyōkai.

a The waves that dash against the rock have ceased
   Their noisy rage, and straightway there is peace:
   But the live coals burn flameless on the hearth,
   Nor cease their heat....

b And such a fire is hell,
   Unceasing flame—not kindled by some fiend,
   Inmate or denizen of Tartarus,
   But kindled, fed, and fanned within the heart
   By mind alone....
c
Mind working endlessly
Produces Hell, and endless are its pains,
To them that know not the true power of Mind,
The One Mind linking all....

d
Yet, oh, the joy
To be a man, and have it in my power
To know the path of Truth, and, traveling thus,
To reach the goal where Hell and Heaven cease
In one Nirvana of perpetual bliss....

e
Great Mida's name sounds constant in my ears,
And as I hear the oft repeated sounds
The veil is drawn that hides the Truth from me,
And the bright light of Heaven fills all my soul....

f
The life thou takest, is it not the same
As that thou lov'st to live?
Then take it not.

Anon.

Yon glassy mirror of the placid lake
Reflects the sky, and trees, and twinkling stars.
Approach it closer, lo! the scene hath changed:
Instead of stars and sky, thou see'st thyself;
For 'twas thy mind created stars and sky,
Reflected in the mirror of the pool.
Thus may'st thou learn that all phenomena
Are but phainomena, or things that seem
To thy reflecting mind, but not the Truth
And Essence of Eternal Verity;—
Which Essence is the all-informing Mind.

Anon.

Year after year the annual flowers bloom
Upon the bush uninterruptedlly.
Thus Buddha lives unchanged; but we, that are
But shows and shadows of the Inner Soul,
Bud, bloom, and die, as changing years roll on.

Anon.

A dewdrop life, a brief and sparkling hour
Upon the lotus leaf! And as I gaze,
My fellow drops, that sparkled in the sun,
Have vanished into nothingness, and I
Am left alone to marvel at my age.
Anon.

The daylight dies: my life is at its end:
To-morrow night the Temple Bell will sound
Its wonted Vesper call, but not for me:
I shall not hear it,—not as "I,"—yet, merged
In the great Whole of Things, I too shall hear.

Anon.

I take no rope in my unskilful hands,
Nor labor at the oar to cross the stream:
The boatman whom I trust will row me o'er
To the safe haven of the shore beyond.

Anon.

The world is nothing but to-day. To-day
Is present, yesterday is past, and lo!
Who knows what will be when to-morrow dawns?

Anon.

Rain, sleet, and snow, the gathering mist that creeps
Adown the mountain-side, the dashing stream
That babbles o'er the pebbles to the sea,—
We give them different names to suit their forms,
But th' underlying substance is the same.

Anon.

You gather stones from off the waste hill-side,
And therewith build a cottage, snug and warm;
But the hut falls with time, and by and by
There's naught, but just the waste hill-side again.

Ikkyu.

My sins piled up reach to Sumeru's top:
Yet, praised be Buddha's name, King Yema's book,
Shows my unhappy record blotted out.

Ikkyu's mother.

When I give utterance to my surging thoughts,
I oft repent me of my foolish words:
When, self-repressed, I hold my peace, my heart
Beats wildly 'gainst its stern restraining bars.
At such times, where is He that sits enthroned
Within my heart, Buddha, the Lord of Peace?
Where, but within the secret Citadel,
Where Passions reach not, finite thoughts ne'er come?

Zeisho Aisuko.

a What is man's life? A bubble on the stream,
   Raised by the splashing rain, which merrily
   Dances along the swiftly gliding wave,
   Full of apparent life, then suddenly
   Breaks and dissolves, and leaves no trace behind,
   To show where it hath been....

b                  A summer moth,
   Hovering at night around the candle-flame,
   And finding, first, its transient joy of life,
   And then its death....

c                  A frail banana-leaf,
   Spreading its beauties to the morning wind,
   And broken in a trice....

d                  A dream that comes
   To lure the soul with sham reality,
   Yet fading in a moment, when the mind
   Wakes to the Truth....

e                  A shadow on the path,
   Lacking all substance, echo without voice,
   Vain phantasy of action....
                   Such is life.