POEMS BY BUDDHIST PRIESTS OF JAPAN.

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY ARTHUR LLOYD.

Identity of Self and Buddha.

“I” lives within material walls of flesh:
Yet when “I” was not, “Self” was ever there,
For “Self” is Buddha.

Anon.

Seek Truth Within.

Whom shall I ask to preach the Law to me?
Whom but my own true mind?

Tou-a.

Care in Seeking.

Through bush and brake you climb to seize the branch
Of the wild cherry-tree that lures you forth,
To seek it for its beauty.

When ’tis seized,
Beware lest, in the hour of joy, you shake
The quickly falling petals from the branch.

Bukkoku Zenji.

One Truth in Various Forms.

a. The teaching of the Buddhas is but one;
   Yet in a thousand ears its varied sounds
   Are thousandfold repeated.

b. Look you now!
   The Lotus of the Holy Law hath bloomed.
   All men are turning Buddhas.
c. How thrice-blessed
Our lot, that, in this space of human life,
Our ears have heard the Holy Law proclaimed.

d. He that has seen the Light, no darkness dwells
Within his soul. Who shall describe the peace
Of that pure land where this true Light doth dwell.

Jichu.

The Blessings of Youth.
All life is sad, yet was the sting of pain
Not half so sharp, when youth was on my side.

Taira no Toryû.

Anticipations of Death.
At eve I hear the sad cicala sing
The knell of darkening days:—a sad farewell,
In case no morrow's dawn should break for me.

Umetsubo no Nyôgyô.

The Individual is Lost in the General Glory.
Miyoshi's plain is gay with many a flower,
Ablaze with varied hues mingling in one:
Each single form and hue is merged and lost:
For all is flower on fair Miyoshino.

Fujiwara Sanetaka.

Man the Mirror of the World.
[RYÔNEN SHÔNIN, the founder of a sect known as the Yûdžûnembutsu, early in the 12th century, is the man who received a visit from an unknown guest, whom he took to be Amida, but who may have been some wandering Christian, for there were one or two of them in Japan even in those early days. The visitor told him that there was one man and one oblation which summed up and represented all saviours and all other religious ceremonies.]

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 the mirror that reflects the world.”

RYÔNEN SHÔNIN.
Saving Faith.
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 shore.

This World and the Next.
This world, the fading grass, the world to come
The peaceful pine whose boughs are evergreen.

Endless Life.
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.

The Joys of the Hermit's Life.
A hermit's cell, and by its lowly door,
A formless mist; but by and by the mist
Transforms itself into the purple cloud
That forms the vestibule of Paradise.

Nothingness.
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 Ens,—Infinite Nothingness?

Spring and Autumn of Life.
The spring flower comes and goes; the autumn moon
Waxes and wanes
And wanes the life of man.

1 Mida = Amida, the Buddha of endless Life and Light.
Impartiality of Divine Grace.
The "light that shineth" shines on all alike,
Without distinction made of this or that:
Nor do men differ, save that, here and there
One turns his face from light, and thinks 'tis dark.
    Jikkyō.

Two Songs about Life.
In my curved palm I hold a tiny drop
Of water, where, for one brief space of time,
I see the moon reflected: Such is life.
    Ki Izurayuki

The dew-drops fall on the broad lotus leaf,
Linger a moments' space, and then roll off.
One here, one there, and are not, Such is life.
    Tōjō Henjō.

The Evil Days.
Ah me, the light that lighteth every man
Burns dimly, with unsteady light, and none
Can fan the dying flame of truth to life:
Thus may we know ill days are near at hand.
    Engaku.

Youth is Blind.
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 lead them to the Way.
    Kūya.

No Flowers Without the Tree.
Spring bids the cherry-blossom fill the land
With fragrant brightness: yet, cut down the tree,
And Spring herself can bid no flowers bloom.
    Anon.
The Law Within Us.

a. Only on some tall rock, that towers aloft  
   High o'er 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 sign  
   To show that it has passed.

c. 'Tis 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 truer light,  
   And knows the Law.

c. The gathering night falls fast.  
   With deepening clouds, yet ever through the gloom  
   The fowl, unerring, finds its homeward way,  
   Trailing across the sky a long black line.

f. So flies my soul back to her native rest  
   Deep in the mountain fastness—to herself.

    Dōgen.

The Inner Light.

The envious clouds obscure the silver moon  
Through this long darksome night. Let it be so:  
There is no darkness where the golden beams  
Of truth illuminate the happy mind.

    Sangyo.

The Value of Moments.

The moment flies unheeded by, and yet  
'Tis pregnant with immeasurable good  
Or endless mischief.
Who can tell its worth?
Therefore be jealous of thy fleeting hours.

Saigyo.

Mercy.
'Tis good that thou show mercy. Lo! the Path
Of all the Buddhas is naught else but this.

Anon.

Two Songs on the Light.
The light that shineth in the silver moon
Shineth in thee; there is no other light,
And happy they that know this only Light.

Narishima Ryohoku.

Thou say'st, "The light that shines in yonder moon
Shineth in me; and yet my mind is dark!"
Burnish the mirror of thy soul, and lo!
'Twill shine as brightly as yon silver moon.

Senkwan.

The Mind of Man.
The waves that dash against the rock exhaust
Their rage, and presently are hilled to peace;
But the live coals burn, flameless, on the hearth,
Nor cease their glow.

And such a fire is hell,
Unceasing, flameless, kindled by no fiend,
Innate or denizen of Tartarus.
But kindled, fed, and fanned within the heart,
By mind alone.

Mind, working endlessly,
Produces Hell; and endless are its pains
To them that know not the true power of mind
In all, to make or mar.

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 Unconscious light.

Gyōkai.
Mind and Phenomena.

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 seest thyself;
For 'twas thy mind created stars and sky
Reflected in the mirror of the lake.
Thus may'st thou learn that all phenomena
Are but φανόμενα, but things that seem
to thy reflecting mind, and not the truth
And essence of eternal verity,—
Which essence is the all-informing mind.

Anon.

Happy Old Age.

Happy the peaceful years that gently glide
Towards their certain end, without a cloud
Cast on them by the deeds of former days.
Is old age happy, with one hope fulfilled,
And two, three, four, still unaccomplished?
Truly, old age at sixes and at sevens?

Komachi.

Local Coloring.

The water in fair Shirakawa's stream
Flows red beneath the autumn maple groves:
Yet, when I draw, from that red-flowing stream,
A cup to quench my thirst, 'tis no more red.

Teishin (a nun).

The Evening of Life.

The daylight dies: my life draws near its end:
To-morrow night the temple bell will sound
Its wonted vespers call,—but not for me.
I shall not hear it,—not as "I"; but, merged
In the great sum of things, I too shall hear.

Anon.
Brief Life Our Portion.
A dew-drop, life! A brief and sparkling hour
Upon the lotus-leaf! And, as I gaze around,
My fellow-drops that twinkled in the sun
Have vanished into nothingness, and I
Am left alone to marvel at my age.

Saigyō.

The Sum of Knowledge.
Know thou canst not regulate thy mind
Just as thou wouldst, and when thou knowest this,
Thou knowest all.

Izumi Shikibu.

Life Reviewed.

My parents bade me come a little while
To stay, an honored guest, upon this earth;
Now that the feast is over, I retire,
Well sated to my home of nothingness.

Rin Shihei.

An Epitaph.

Here, where a dew-drop vanished from the leaf,
The autumn wind pipes sadly in the grass.

Tora, at the grave of her lover, Soga Gorō.

All Things Change Save Buddha.

Year after year the annual flowers bloom
Upon the selfsame bush, and, blooming, die,
Yet the bush lives uninterruptedly.
Thus Buddha lives unchanged; while we, that are
But shows and shadows of the inner soul,
Bud, bloom, and die, as rolling years speed on.

Anon.

The Mind is Buddha.

The mind is Buddha; not that mind alone,
One and the same, that dwells in nature’s whole.
But mine, the surface wave upon the sea
Of matter, that is Buddha.
Can there be
Ocean distinct from ocean's surging waves?
Anon.


[I do not know who the author of this poem was, but probably a Buddhist
priest as I found the poem in a Buddhist preachers' Manual. The Buddhist
uses the thought underlying this poem in precisely the same way as a Christ-
tian would, to emphasize the need of an incarnation.]

Men talk of the Gods' Way. If there be such,
'Tis not for men to tread it; none but gods
Can tread the holy pathway of the gods.

Hagura Toman.

*Crossing the Ferry.*

[The boatman here is Amida, and the main thought is salvation by faith
alone.]

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

Anon.

*The Worth of Silence.*

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
Flutters itself to rest and happiness.
At such time, where is he that sits enthroned,
Ruling my heart, Buddha, the Lord of Peace?
Where, but within the secret citadel
Which passions reach not, finite thought ne'er grasps?

The Mother of the Priest Ikkyu.

*Uncertainty of Life.*

[Shinran (end of 12th century) was a very celebrated priest and founder
of the Shinshu sect.]

Say not, "there'll be a morrow," for to-night
The wind may rise, and e'er the morning dawn,
The cherry-bloom lie scattered on the earth.

Shinran Shōnin.
Carpe Diem.

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

The One Way.

[Ito was a Confucianist and as such a very strong opponent of Buddhism. The Zen, or contemplative, Buddhists are nowever very near the Confucianists in their strict ideas about morality and watchfulness over self.]

The more I think thereon, the more I know
That but one way exists for men to walk,
The way by which man learns to keep himself.
      Ito Jinsai.

The Need of a Guide Outside of Man.

[Kōbō Daishi, beginning of the 9th century, was one of the great founders of what may be called "theistic" Buddhism in Japan. His supreme God was a mysterious Buddha named Vairocana, whom he identified with Amaterasu, the sun-goddess, and thus paved the way for a reconciliation between Buddhism and Shinto which lasted until 1869 when the Imperial Government insisted on the purification of Shinto.]

What human voice can tell me, "this is good
For man to do," or, "this is bad for thee"?
The voice of man speaks as the mind of man
Dictates, and mind is naught but constant change.
      Kōbō Daishi.

Filial Piety.

[There are several temples in Japan which commemorate the filial piety (yōrō) of the devoted son who goes every day to the forest to cut wood in order to supply his aged parent with liquor, and is at last rewarded by finding a cascade of the purest sake.]

To quench his father's thirst, the filial son
Toiled to fair Yōrō's stream, and, drawing thence
A vessel full of water from the well,
Bore it home lovingly.
The admiring gods,
Seeing the filial deed set to their seals,
And turned the sparkling water into wine.

Anon.

What is After Death?

[The sentiment is more Confucianist than Buddhist. The author was a Buddhist priest of the extreme Zen sect which is very closely allied to Confucianism.]

Where goes the flame when the too envious breath
Of heaven tears it from its burning wick?
Where, but to its primeval home, the Dark?

Muso Kokushi (13th century).

Take no Life.

[Buddhism takes the commandment "thou shalt not kill," in its widest sense, and forbids the taking of all animal life. I believe this to have been one of the reasons why Buddhism has had so very little hold on the samurai or warrior class, who have always been addicted to sport as well as the practice of arms.]

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

Gyokai.

God in Nature.

[God (Buddha) to the Buddhist is immanent in all nature.]

The golden hues upon the sunlit peak,
The water babbling o'er its pebbly bed,
Are they not Buddha's Presence and His Voice?

Shōyō.

The Traces of a Former Existence.

[The similarity to Wordsworth will not escape the reader. It is a commonplace of Buddhism.]

The image thou beholdest in thy soul,
What is it but the trail of glory brought
From some prenatal life yon side the womb?

Muso Kokushi.
Forgiveness.

[Ikkyū was famous as a priest, a poet, a preacher and a painter. He was also a humorist, and it was possibly to his humor that he owed his success in other lines of life. Though a Zen priest, he seems to have believed in the forgiveness of sins through Amida. Sumeru is a fabulous mountain of the Buddhists. Yema is the King of Hades and the judge of departed souls.]

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

Ikkyū (1394-1481).

The Name of Salvation.

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

Gyokū.

Consciousness is a Sense of Loss.

All day the wind blows rustling through the pines,
Yet 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.

Rengetsu.

One Substance Under Different Forms.

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

Anon.

We Came from Nothing and Return to Nothing.

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

Anon.

2 Mida = Amida. The prayer-formula of the Shinshu and Jōdo sects consists of a constant repetition of Amida's name.
Man's Life.

[I have not been able to find anything about this writer whose five poems I have here strung together. He was probably a priest.]

a. What is man's life?
   A bubble on the stream,
   Caused by the splashing rain which merrily
   Dances along the swiftly moving wave,
   Full of apparent life, then suddenly
   Breaks and dissolves, and lo! it vanishes,
   Leaving no trace.

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

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

d. A dream that comes,
   Luring the soul with sham realities,
   But fading in a moment, when the eye
   Opes to the world of truth.

e. A shadow cast
   That has no substance, echo without voice,
   A phantasy of action.

   Such is life.
   Zeisho Atsuko.