

THE LOTUS GOSPEL.

BY THE EDITOR.

BEFORE me lies a book in two volumes entitled *World Healers, or The Lotus Gospel and its Bôdhisattvas compared with Early Christianity*,¹ written by E. A. Gordon, with an introductory letter by A. H. Sayce, of Queen's College, Oxford. It is brimful of interesting material on comparative religion, and the gospel it preaches is a kind of combination of Christianity with Buddhism. The author's idea is expressed in the Preface as follows: "That modern Christianity would be deepened and spiritualized beyond conception by coming into contact with the teachings of the venerable Mahayana and their expression in the wondrous art treasures of the Far East, there is very little doubt."

Professor Sayce in his letter thus adds his approval: "You seem to me to have proved what an intimate relation there is between Buddhism and early Christianity."

While the data here collected are not treated with the critical reserve and accuracy needed for such an undertaking, we have found in these two volumes much that is of general interest and we will reproduce from their pages a number of illustrations with the necessary explanations.

We find on page 192 the Mahayana, the great vessel of salvation, pictured as a ship in the center of which Buddha stands. From his fingers his thoughts stream forth represented as a number of people in a kneeling posture seeking salvation. The eastern ships have eyes painted on their prow, and in this the eye is plainly visible in front. Flowers rain down, and even the waters are covered with lotus blossoms.

Mrs. Gordon is struck with the similarity between Buddhist and Christian nuns. Not only is the rosary very similar but the head dress is practically the same, and she reproduces a picture of

¹ Published by Eugene L. Morice, of Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, London, and also in China and Japan.

Chujo-hime, the "Lotus Princess," who in the year 763 entered the order and retired from the world (because, as the story goes, she



THE BUDDHIST SHIP OF SALVATION BOUND FOR PARADISE.

was "the victim of a cruel stepmother's tyranny") and was considered an incarnation of Quan Yin. She is still remembered,

for we read: "Each spring, on May 14, the reception of the young princess-nun into paradise is commemorated in a wonderful mystery procession which enacts 'The Coming of Amida with Twenty-five



CHUJO-HIME, THE LOTUS PRINCESS.

Bosatsus' and the whole company of 'heavenly men, women, and children' to compensate this little nun who—in her mortal life—was so grievously afflicted."

Another Japanese princess who has become dear to the Japanese Buddhists is the Empress Asuka-himé, of whom Mrs. Gordon says:

"About the year 735, the Empress Asuka-himé made votive images and vowed to receive, bathe, and cleanse 1000 sick folks if Yakushi [Buddha] would heal her own disease, which is variously described as consumption, blindness, or leprosy. By his grace, her prayer was granted, and so the temple 'Yakushi-ji' was erected in thanksgiving at Nara. It is said that 999 patients arrived, but that for a long time no others came.

"At length a wretched outcast, so terribly defaced and deformed that he was hardly human, craved admission into the hospice, which was readily granted. He then said that Amida had appeared to him in vision, assuring him of cure if only the empress could be persuaded to suck the poison from the putrefying sores which covered him from head to foot, and filled the atmosphere with awful corruption.

"The empress naturally recoiled from this extreme act of self-abnegation (which, however, was divinely destined to develop her own character and ensure her spiritual perfection), so the leper turned sadly away.

"Then it flashed across Her Majesty that *this* was the thousandth patient for whom she had so long and anxiously prayed, and now, alas! rejected. So, having him recalled, she confessed her hesitancy and repugnance and, enjoining silence, she put her lips to the foul wounds, '*for Buddha's sake.*' Instantly the leper, bidding Her Majesty, also, '*tell no man who he was,*' (Luke v. 14), vanished in the most radiant glory, filling the air with fragrance.

"This is one of the many lovely stories which Japanese mothers tell their children. When visiting the spot, I heard that a hospital is about to be raised there by the Imperial University of Kyoto in commemoration of this event.

"The name bestowed upon Asuka-himé after death was Komyo Kogo, 'Empress of Light,' for, as a 'Fruit of the Light,' she had caused copies of the *King Komyo-kyo*, or 'Luminous-Golden-Light-sûtra,' to be made in simple language and distributed throughout Japan. One such the writer saw at Koya-san in the empress's own handwriting.

"With the Emperor Shomu's help, she founded a monastery and nunnery in every province and built dispensaries, where medicines were freely given to the sick (paid for out of the house-taxes), also asylums for the indigent poor, and orphanages.

“This empress’s simplicity of heart is revealed in her poem :

“If I pluck these flowers to offer them to Buddha,
The touch of my hand will defile them;
Therefore, growing in the fields as they stand
I offer these wind-blown blossoms
To the Buddha of Past, Present, and To Come!”



EMPERESS KOMYO KOGO GREETED BY THE CHILDREN IN PARADISE.

“Our illustration depicts Asuka-himé entering the Land of Light [Paradise]—welcomed by the children who have become *hotoké* [sainted].”

Mrs. Gordon discusses the development of Buddha statues as they varied in size. In the eighth century the first colossal statue (160 feet in height, with a face 16 feet long) was cast. Since it



THE AMITABHA OF KAMAKURA.

Erected A. D. 1252. From a Japanese Painting.

has twice suffered from fire it cannot compare with the Kamakura Amitabha (erected by the Lady Itano in 1252) whose majestic calm, exquisite tenderness and beautiful smile seem the embodiment of divine love. We here offer for comparison a photograph of this

great statue side by side with a reproduction of a painting by a Japanese artist.

Mrs. Gordon adds: "The colossal size of the images arises,



THE AMITABHA OF KAMAKURA.

From a photograph.

doubtless, from the desire to magnify the perfections of one whose 'lips are full of grace and truth' and who is 'fairer than the children

of men'—'the infinite heart of Buddha, who has not a small heart as we have!'"

Our author takes great interest in the Nestorian tablet at



THE NESTORIAN MONUMENT SURROUNDED BY BUDDHIST MONKS.

Sian-Fu, and has taken a photograph of the venerable monument of Chinese Christianity, surrounded by Buddhist monks who point out terms used on the stone which are common to both faiths, Christianity and Buddhism.