

NOTES

THE Japanese scholars, public men, and Buddhists are going to celebrate the 1300th anniversary of Prince Shotoku (574-622), at Horyuji Temple, Nara, the first foundation of which was laid by him as regent to the Empress Suiko. He was the second son of the Emperor Yomei, and it was through his decided attitude towards Buddhism that the latter began to take root firmly in the soil of the newly transplanted country. He built many temples and gave great encouragement to the growth of the fine arts in Japan. In those days Buddhism represented a superior culture to that which had already been reached by the Japanese, and the Prince was a most radical progressionist. Before him all the conservatists and reactionaries were covered. He was the author of the famous "Constitution of Seventeen Articles" in which he emphatically decrees that the Buddhist trinity should be kept in high reverence. He was a Buddhist scholar himself, and is recorded to have written commentaries on some of the important Buddhist Sutras, which are still in existence. He also built many charitable institutions devoting a part of the national revenue to those purposes. He was thus at once a statesman, artist, scholar, and social reformer. He died at forty-eight when there were still many things awaiting his strong and far-sighted management. Without him, however, the history of ancient Japan and Buddhism in this country would have been quite different from what it has been.

Another celebration which already took place in March at Mount Hiyei, near Kyoto, was the one thousand and one hundredth anniversary of the founder of the Tendai sect in

Japan. His name was Saicho and his posthumous title Dengyo Daishi (767-822). To quote Mr. Junkei Washiwo, who writes in the March issue of *The Central Buddhism* (中央佛教) in substance as follows: "When Dengyo established the Tendai sect on Hiei, he was really consolidating the foundations of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Japan. Prince Shotoku was his forerunner, and what he did for Buddhism was successively and brilliantly carried out two hundred years later by Dengyo. The latter went to China to study Buddhism, and when he came back, his first work was to open up Hiei which would be the spiritual fountain for the empire of Japan." The development of Buddhism and the advance of general culture was the result of his activities. When the spirit of his teaching died on Mt. Hiei, Buddhism degenerated, and the new era of Kamakura Buddhism dawned to supplant the Hiei.

Nichiren (1222-1282) was one of the greatest figures that ushered in the Kamakura Buddhism, which is distinguished from the previous Heian Buddhism by its vitality, independence, originality, and complete assimilation of the continental ideals with those of the Japanese. The celebration of Nichiren's septenary is now going on in Japan. Until the Kamakura period during which he prospered, Japanese Buddhism was more or less an imported affair from the continent; there was in it no self-assertion, no spontaneous growth, in the sense that it was really what was wanted by the people generally. Being a son of a fisherman in an obscure village in Awa, he was democratic in spirit, and knew that the Buddhism adopted by the court and studied at the aristocratic monasteries of Kyoto was no genuine thing appealing to the heart of the commoner. But his most aggressive attitude towards the other schools of Buddhism already in existence brought on him such antagonism that he had to go through many a threat of death. Even now his followers are quite

positive in the assertion of their faith. They are also noted for their nationalistic spirit, which greatly appeals to soldiers. The septenary celebration of this unique personality in the history of Buddhism as well as in that of Japan is taking place at two centers of the Nichiren sect, one at Kominato, of Awa province, where he was born, and at Mount Minobu, of Kai province, the place where his ashes are quietly resting after a most tempestuous life of sixty-one years.

A heated controversy has been going on for some time since last year between two or rather three Buddhist scholars of eminence concerning the authorship of a great Mahāyāna book, known as Aṣvaghosha's *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*. This was translated into English by the editor of the present magazine some years ago. (This translation by the way requires a complete revision, which the editor intends to undertake before long.) Readers acquainted with this work know well that it is one of the most significant works in the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism, for it marks a decided course in its development. The point of controversy is, "Was Aṣvaghosha its real author?" or rather, "Was not the book written by a Chinese Buddhist scholar who had a wonderful knowledge of Buddhism and an intellect of the first grade?" Professor Sensei Murakami, of the Tokyo Imperial University, thinks it to be the work of a Chinese Buddhist while he is unable to suggest the name of the real author. He is at any rate sure of the book's not being Aṣvaghosha's. Rev. Shinko Mochidsuki, of the Jodo sect, is of the same view, but he is quite positive in his assertion that the *Awakening of Faith* is no Indian work, but assuredly a Chinese production. Mr. Daijo Tokiwa, who lectures in the Tokyo Imperial University, is the upholder of the traditional view that Aṣvaghosha was the author and Paramārtha translated it into Chinese. Internal and external evidences are produced on both sides. Dr. Mura-

kami, however, does not deny the important rôle the book played in the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism generally. Later we may have occasion to refer to the subject more in detail.

The frontispiece to the present issue of *The Eastern Buddhist* represents the famous Kwannon Bosatsu of the Yumedono Sanctuary in Horyuji, Nara, where the 1300th anniversary of its founder, Prince Shotoku, is now being celebrated. This Kwannon traditionally regarded as the work of the Prince himself is what is known as a *hibutsu* or "secret Buddha" and is ordinarily kept away from public sight. It was most carefully preserved all swathed in cotton cloth until Ernest Fenollosa who was at the time professor of philosophy in the Tokyo University discovered it in 1884 for the first time in centuries. (*Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, pp. 50-51.) The Bosatsu is carved in wood and covered with gold-foil. Inside the octagonal Yumedono there is a shrine on a double stone-pedestal, in which the statue is kept. To quote from *Handbook of the Old Shrines and Temples and Their Treasures* (pp. 131-2), which was recently compiled by the Educational Department: "When the panels are open, the Kwannon confronts us. But as the curtains hang low, it is necessary to raise part of them in order to have a better view of the Buddha. Even then the whole form is partly hidden by the figures standing in front. When however the side-panels are removed we can see the full profile of the holy image. The dignified attitude almost overawes us. The Buddhist statues enshrined in this temple as well as in all the other temples in Nara are numberless, and each in its way has been the object of veneration; but there is no statue among them that will strike us with such a spiritual force, compelling reverence and even worship, as this image of Kwannon in the Yumedono Sanctuary.... This is the most valuable relic that has come down to us—a work reminiscent

of the earliest days of Japanese Buddhist faith as expressing itself in the purest imagination of art." The statue is a work of the Asuka period (552-644, A.D.). Esthetically considered, according to Fenollosa, "the finest feature is the profile view of the head with its sharp Han nose, its straight clear forehead, and its rather large—almost negroid—lips, on which a quiet mysterious smile plays, not unlike Da Vinci's Mona Lisa's. Recalling the archaic stiffness of Egyptian art at its finest, it appears still finer in the sharpness and individuality of the cutting. In slimness it is like a Gothic statue from Amiens, but far more peaceful and unified in its single system of lines."