

THE
EASTERN BUDDHIST

MAY, 1949

EDITORIAL

THE Eastern Buddhist Society has suspended its activities during the war-years, but we now intend to resume them in a smaller way. There are still many serious obstacles which we are not quite sure of having in control.

With the political and economical re-orientation of Japan caused by the fates of the War, Buddhism has also come to be evaluated newly.

The War has indeed effected a thorough-going transformation of Japan in various ways, and here we wish to touch upon the spiritual life of the people.

Shintoism known as "Shrine Shinto" is under a ban now. It has been severed from the state to which it was hitherto closely attached and with which to a certain extent it identified itself, serving the state as a kind of operative principle. Hereafter, Shinto will have to endeavour to find the place where it fits the best in the cultural scheme of the Japanese life, if it is not going to deteriorate into a mass of superstitions.

Christian activities will be accelerated and no doubt the Japanese people thereby benefitted. For one thing, they will learn a great deal about the social aspect of religion, which is one of the most distinctive characteris-

tics of Christianity. While religion is essentially concerned with the question of the individual soul in relation to God, the individual has no sense when it is detached from society. The Japanese who have been used to the vertical hierarchic conception of a feudalistic community know nothing about the horizontal democratic relationship existing among its individual units. Christianity insists upon its members being directly, vertically, paternalistically connected with God; yet it does not forget our horizontal fraternalistic connection among ourselves. It is possible that the democratic spirit cherished by the Christians is the offshoot of their political ideas.

The Orient has not fully learned the technique of systematisation or organisation, and in this respect Christianity representing Western culture and social institution will have much to stir up the Japanese mind along with its religious teaching.

While the militaristic regime was in full power, Buddhism was not very well countenanced, not because its followers were not willing enough to espouse its cause, but mainly because Buddhism is essentially a religion looking after the spiritual welfare of humanity, and not a system of teachings always ready to identify itself with the state and its egotistic assertion of power.

With the ending of the War, Buddhism is regaining its original status though the feudalistic frame in which it has been set throughout its history in Japan is now proving the greatest possible obstacle for its re-adjustment. It will take years of internal and external struggles before it can present itself as a supreme spiritual force.

But it is the Buddhist institution and not the teaching that requires a total remodelling. Our conviction is: Buddhism is a world-religion and has a mission of

its own which cannot be replaced by Christianity, when the world is given up to the materialistic, mechanistic, economic, and scientific interpretation of Reality and has no time to reflect within itself and quietly to come in personal contact with God, Buddhism, we wish to state, has a great deal to say to the Western people as much as to the Eastern people.

The human mind eternally strives for synthesis or unification, which, however, can never be achieved as long as we remain in the intellectual plane. But it is our fate that we can never get away from rationalising, which means in turn that we are to stay in this world of differentiation.

The two world religions, Christianity and Buddhism, will never be coalesced as one religion; they will serve humanity the best by each keeping to its own specific feature of spiritual experience. Let therefore each propound its teaching according to the light it has gained.

As facts stand, Buddhism is not properly understood in the West, that is, by the Christian nations. We mean here by Buddhism the Mahayana school of Buddhism as it prevails in China and Japan, especially in the latter at present. Most observers take the form for the content, the intellectual presentation for the experiential facts, the traditional and historical appendage for the reality itself. This may be generally unavoidable; and the duty of the Buddhists will be to elucidate its essentials to the fullest extent of their capacity so that the West will come gradually to comprehend what Buddhism really is and what the Buddhist life really means to humanity.

A scholarly interpretation of Buddhist history and philosophy is no doubt important in understanding Buddhism, but what is more urgently needed for the general

public is to present its thought as based in life itself. Its followers may not know much about the Fourfold Noble Truth, the Twelve Links of Causation, the Eightfold Path of Righteousness, or other doctrinal theories associated with historical Buddhism; but they must face such problems of life as the meaning of the individual, its relationship to society and God, birth and death, "karmic bondage," "unthinkable (or mysterious) emancipation," Enlightenment, etc. These are eternal problems of life confronting every one of us and demanding final solution.

With the conclusion of the War, Japan has been made to emerge from her insularistic way of thinking and feeling. While she is at present economically and politically hampered in various ways and cannot express herself freely, she is allowed to enjoy spiritual liberty which is in fact the fountainhead of all kinds of worldly freedoms, and this spirituality—whatever it is that is left now in the Japanese life—comes from Buddhism. For this reason, it is required of us Japanese Buddhists to be actively engaged more than ever in propounding Buddhist experience and its philosophical interpretation to the whole world. And we must present our views on them as best we can, however inadequate our best may be, and if possible in the light of modern thought so that they will be more readily comprehended by the readers other than Buddhist.

This is the self-imposed mission of the Eastern Buddhist Society in resuming its publication.