

Reedy

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The Higher Buddhism.



Philosophical Buddhism requires some brief consideration in this place, — for two reasons. The first is that misapprehension or ignorance of the subject has rendered possible the charge of atheism against the intellectual classes of Japan. The second reason is that many persons imagine the Japanese common people — that is to say, the greater part of the nation — to profess the doctrine of Nirvāna as extinction (though, as a matter of fact, even the meaning of the word is unknown to the masses), and quite resigned to vanish from the face of the earth, because of that desire for posthumous annihilation which the doctrine is supposed to create. A little serious thinking ought to convince any intelligent

man that no such creed could ever have been the religion of either a savage or a civilized people.

But myriads of Western minds are ready at all times to accept statements of impossibility, without taking the trouble to think about them; and if I can show some of my readers how far beyond popular comprehension the doctrines of the highest Buddhism really are, something will have been accomplished for the cause of truth and common-sense. And besides the reasons already given for dwelling upon the subject, there is this third and special reason, — that it is one of extraordinary interest to the student of modern philosophy.

3 lds

Before going further, I must remind you that the metaphysics

of Buddhism can be studied anywhere else. Quite as well as in Japan, since the more important sūtras have been translated into various European languages, and most of the untranslated texts edited and published. The texts of Japanese Buddhism are Chinese; and only Chinese scholars are competent to throw light upon the minor special phases of the subject. Even to read the Chinese Buddhist canon of 7000 volumes is commonly regarded as an impossible feat, — though it has certainly been accomplished in Japan. Then there are the commentaries, the varied interpretations of different sects, the multiplication of later doctrine & heap confusion upon confusion. The complexities of Japanese Buddhism are incalculable; and those who try to unravel them soon become, as a general rule, hopelessly lost in

the maze of detail. All this has
 nothing to do with my present
 purpose. I shall have very
 little to say about Japanese
 Buddhism as distinguished from
 other Buddhism, and nothing at
 all to say about sect-differences.
 I shall keep to general facts as
 regards the higher doctrine, —
 selecting from among such facts
 only those most suitable for
 the illustration of that doctrine.
 And I shall not take up the
 subject of Nirvāna, in spite
 of its great importance, — having
 treated it as fully as I was
 able in my "Lectures on Buddha-
 -Fields," — but confine myself to
 the topic of certain analogies
 between the conclusions of Buddhist
 metaphysics and the conclusions
 of contemporary Western thought.

#1/2

line

In the best single volume yet produced in English on the subject of Buddhism*, the late Mr. Henry Clarke Warren observed:—"A large part of the pleasure that I have experienced in the study of Buddhism has arisen from what I may call the strangeness of the intellectual landscape. All the ideas, the modes of argument, — even the postulates assumed and not argued about, — have always seemed so strange, so different from anything to which I have been accustomed, that I felt all the time as though walking in Fairyland. Much of the charm that the Oriental thought and ideas have for me appears to be because they so seldom fit in to

* "Buddhism in Translation," by Henry Clarke Warren. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1896.) Published by Harvard University.

Western categories.... The serious attraction of Buddhist philosophy could not be better suggested: it is indeed "the strangeness of the intellectual landscape" — as of a world inside-out and upside-down — that has chiefly interested Western thinkers heretofore. Yet after all, there is a class of Buddhist concepts which can be fitted, or very nearly fitted, into Western categories. The higher Buddhism is a kind of Monism; and it includes doctrines that accord, in the most surprising manner, with the scientific theories of the German and the English monists. To my thinking, the most curious part of the subject, and its main interest, is represented just by these accordances,—

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— particularly in view of the fact that the Buddhist conclusions have been reached through mental processes unknown to Western thinking, and unaided by any knowledge of science... I venture to call myself a disciple of Herbert Spencer; and it was because of my acquaintance with the Dialectic Philosophy that I came to find in Buddhist philosophy a more than romantic interest. For Buddhism is also a theory of evolution — though the great central idea of our scientific evolution (the law of progress from homogeneity to heterogeneity) is not correspondingly implied by Buddhist doctrine as regards the life of this world. The course of evolution as we conceive it, according to Professor Huxley,

"must describe a trajectory like that of a ball fired from a mortar; and the sinking half of that course is as much a part of the general process of evolution as the rising."

The highest point of the trajectory would represent what Mr. Spencer calls Equilibration, — the supreme point of development preceding the period of decline; — but, in Buddhist evolution this supreme point vanishes in Nirvâna.

I can best illustrate the Buddhist position by asking you to imagine the trajectory line upside down, — a course descending out of the infinite, touching ground, and reascending again to mystery. . . . Nevertheless, some Buddhist ideas do offer the most startling analogy with the evolutionary ideas of our own time; and

even those Buddhist concepts most remote from Western thought can be best interpreted by the help of illustrations and of language borrowed from modern science.

Paper

I think that we may consider the most remarkable teachings of the Higher Buddhism, — excluding the doctrine of Nirvāna, for the reason already given, — to be the following: —

That there is but one

Reality; —

That the consciousness is not the real Self; —

That Matter is an aggregate of phenomena created by the force of acts and thoughts; —

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- All things having form
or name, - Buddhas, gods, men,
and all living creatures, - suns,
worlds, moons, the whole visible
cosmos, - are transitory pheno-
mena... Assuming, with
Herbert Spencer, that the
test of reality is permanence,
one can scarcely question this
position; - it differs little from
from the statement with which
the closing chapter of the
First Principles concludes: -

"Though the relation of
subject and object renders
necessary to us these anti-
-thetical conceptions of
Spirit and Matter, the one
is no less than the other
to be regarded as but a
sign of the Unknown Reality
which underlies both." - (Edition
of 1894.)

mind
- level

For Buddhism the sole reality is the Absolute, — Buddha as uncondi-
 -tioned and Infinite Being. There
 is no other veritable existence, whether
 of Matter or of Mind; — there is
 no real individuality or personality; —
 the "I" and the "Not-I" are
 essentially nowise different. We are
 reminded of Mr. Spencer's position,
 that "it is one and the same
 Reality which is manifested to us
 both subjectively and objectively."

Mr. Spencer goes on to say: —

"Subject and Object, as actually
 existing, can never be contained in
the consciousness produced by the
coöperation of the two, though
 they are necessarily implied by it; —
 and the antithesis of Subject
 and Object, never to be transcended
 while consciousness lasts, renders
 impossible all knowledge of that

Ultimate Reality in which Subject
 and Object are united." I do
 not think that a master of the
 Highest Buddhism would dispute
 Mr. Spencer's doctrine of Transfig-
 -ured Realism. Buddhism does
 not deny the actuality of phenomena
 as phenomena, but denies their
 permanence, and the truth of the
 appearances which they present
 to our imperfect senses. Being
 transitory, and not what they seem,
 they are to be considered in the
 nature of illusions, - impermanent
 manifestations of the only permanent
 Reality. But the Buddhist
 position is not agnosticism: it
 is astonishingly different, as we
 shall presently see. Mr. Spencer
 states that we cannot know the
 Reality so long as consciousness
 lasts, - because while consciousness

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last we cannot transcend the antithesis
of Object and Subject, and it is this
very antithesis which makes conscious-
ness possible. "Very true," the
Buddhist metaphysician would reply;
— "we cannot know the sole Reality
while consciousness lasts. But destroy
consciousness, and the Reality becomes
cognizable. Annihilate the illusion
of mind, and the light will
come." This destruction of
consciousness signifies Nirvâna, —
the extinction of all that we call
Self. Self is blindness:
destroy it, and the Reality will
be revealed as infinite vision
and infinite peace.

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Ques

- We have now to ask what, according to Buddhist philosophy, is the meaning of the visible universe as phenomenon, and the nature of the consciousness that perceives. However transitory, the phenomenon makes an impression upon consciousness; - and consciousness itself, though transitory, has existence; and its perceptions, however delusive, are perceptions of actual relation. Buddhism answers that both the universe and the consciousness are merely aggregates of Karma, - complexities incalculable of conditions shaped by acts and thoughts through some enormous past. All substance and all conditioned mind (as distinguished from unconditioned mind) are products

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They are only results endlessly produced by innumerable actions. In tracing every thing back to the ultimate limits of the past, we cannot find a beginning: hence it is said that death and birth have no beginning. Again when seeking the ultimate limit of the future, we cannot find the end." *

Princess The
Lead.

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This teaching that all things are formed by Karma, — whatever is good in the universe representing the results of meritorious acts or thoughts; and whatever is evil, the results of evil acts or thoughts, — has the approval of five of the great sects; and we may accept it as a leading doctrine of Japanese Buddhism... The cosmos is, then, an aggregate of Karma; and the mind

* "Essentials of the Mahâyâna Philosophy," by D. Kirosda.

of man is an aggregate of Karma;—
and the beginnings thereof are un-
-known, and the end cannot be ima-
-gined. There is a spiritual evo-
-lution, of which the goal is Nirvâna;
but we have no declaration as to a
final state of universal rest, when
the shaping of substance and of
mind will have ceased forever...

Now the Dynthetic Philosophy
assumes a very similar position
as regards the evolution of phenomena
: there is no beginning of evolution,
nor any conceivable end. I quote
from Mr. Spencer's reply to a
critic in the North American

Review : —

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— "That 'absolute com-
-mencement of organic life
upon the globe,' which the reviewer
says I 'cannot evade the ad-
-mission of,' I distinctly deny.

Smaller
type
— lead

Smaller Type — General

The affirmation of universal evolution is in itself the negation of an absolute commencement of anything. Conceived in terms of evolution, every kind of being is conceived as a product of modification wrought by insensible gradations upon a preëxisting kind of being; — and this holds as fully of the supposed 'commencement of organic life' as of all subsequent developments of organic life... That organic matter was not produced all at once, but was reached through steps, we are well warranted in believing by the experiences of chemists...^{*}

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* "Principles of Biology," Vol. I., p. 462.

Of course it should be understood that the Buddhist silence, as to a beginning and an end, concerns only the production of phenomena, not any particular existence of groups of phenomena. That of which no beginning or end can be predicated is simply the Eternal Becoming. And, like the older Indian philosophy, from which it sprang, Buddhism teaches the alternate apparition and disappearance of universes. At certain prodigious periods of time, the whole Cosmos of "one hundred thousand times ten millions of worlds" vanishes away, — consumed by fire or otherwise destroyed, — but only to be reformed again. These periods are called "World-Cycles", and each World-Cycle is divided into four "Immensities",^{2m} — but we need not here consider the details of the doctrine. It is

only the fundamental idea of an
 evolutionary rhythm that is really
 interesting. I need scarcely remind
 the reader that the alternate dis-
 -integration and reintegration of
 the cosmos is also a scientific
 conception, and a commonly accepted
 article of evolutionary belief. I
 may quote, however, for other reasons,
 the paragraph expressing Herbert
 Spencer's views upon the subject:—

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"Apparently, the universally-
 -coexistent forces of attraction
 and repulsion, which, as we have
 seen, necessitate rhythm in all
 minor changes throughout the
 Universe, also necessitate rhythm
 in the totality of changes, —
 produce now an immeasurable
 period during which the attractive
 forces, predominating, cause
 universal concentration; and
 then an immeasurable period
 during which the repulsive
 forces, predominating, cause

Spencer's The
 - least

diffusion, — alternate eras of
Evolution and Dissolution. And
 thus there is suggested to us the
 conception of a past during which
 there have been successive
 Evolutions analogous to that which
 is now going on; and a future
 during which successive other
 such Evolutions may go on —
 ever the same in principle,
 but never the same in
 concrete result." — (First
Principles, § 183. *)

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Further on, Mr. Spencer has
 pointed out the vast logical
 consequence involved by this
 hypothesis: —

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* This paragraph, from the fourth edition, has been considerably
 qualified in the definitive edition of 1900.

Suber

" If, as we saw reason
 to think, there is an alter-
 -nation of Evolution and
 Dissolution in the totality
 of things, — if, as we are
 obliged to infer from the
 Persistence of Force, the
 arrival at either limit of
 this vast rhythmic bridge
 about the conditions under
 which a counter-movement
 commences, — if we are hence
 compelled to underlain the
 conception of Evolutions that
 have filled an immeasurable
 past, and Evolutions that
 will fill an immeasurable future, —
 we can no longer con-
 -plate the visible creation
 as having a definite begin-

Success Type — lean

-ning or end, or as being isolated. It becomes unified with all existence before and after; and the Force which the Universe presents falls into the same category with its Space and Time as admitting of no limitation in thought."*
 (First Principles, § 190.

$\frac{1}{2}$ line

* Condensed and somewhat modified in the definitive edition of 1900; but, for present purposes of illustration, the text of the fourth edition has been preferred.

— The foregoing Buddhist positions sufficiently imply that the human consciousness is but a temporary aggregate, — not an eternal entity. There is no permanent Self: there is but one eternal principle in all life, — the supreme Buddha. Modern Japanese call this Absolute the "essence of mind". "The fire fed by faggots," writes one of these, "dies when the faggots have been consumed; but the essence of fire is never destroyed... all things in the Universe are mind." So stated, the position is unscientific; but as for the conclusion reached, we may remember that Mr. Wallace has stated almost exactly the same thing, and that there are not a few modern preachers of the doctrine of a "universal of mind-stuff." The hypothesis is unthinkable. But the most

serious thinker will agree with the Buddhist assertion that the relation of all phenomena to the Unknowable is merely that of waves to sea.

"Every feeling and thought being but transitory," says Mr. Spencer, — "and entire life made up of such feelings and thoughts being but transitory, — nay, the object amid which life is passed, though less transitory, being, nevertheless, in course of losing their individualities quickly or slowly, — we learn that the one thing permanent is the Unknown Reality hidden under all these changing shapes."

Here the English and the Buddhist philosophers are in accord; but thereafter they suddenly part company. For Buddhism is not

agnosticism, but gnosticism, and professes
to know the unknowable. The thinkers
of Mr. Spencer's school cannot
make assumptions as to the nature
of the sole Reality, nor as to the
reasons of its manifestations. He
must confess himself intellectually
incapable of comprehending the
nature of force, matter, or motion.
He feels justified in accepting
the hypothesis that all known
elements have been evolved from
one primordial undifferentiated
substance, — the chemical
evidence for this hypothesis
being very strong. But he
certainly would not call that
primordial substance a sub-
-stance of mind, nor attempt
to explain the character of
the forces that effected its
indegredation. Again, though

Mr. Spencer would probably acknowledge that we know of matter only as an aggregate of forces, and of atoms only as force-centres, or knots of force, he would not declare that an atom is a knot of force, and nothing else... But we find evolutionists of the German school taking a position very similar to the Buddhist position, — which implies a universal tendency, or, more strictly speaking, a universal potential-tendency. Haeckel and other German monists assume such a condition for all substance. They are not agnostics, therefore, but gnostics; and their gnosticism very much resembles that of the higher Buddhism.

According to Buddhism there is no reality save Buddha: all things else are but Karma. There is but one Life, one Self: human individuality or a personality are but phenomenal conditions of that Self. Matter is Karma; Mind is Karma — that is to say, mind as we know it; Karma, as visibility, represents to us mass and quality; Karma, as mentality, signifies character and tendency. The primordial substance — corresponding to the "principle" of our Monists — is composed of Five Elements, which are mystically identified with Five Buddhas, all of whom are really but different modes of the One. With this idea of a primordial substance there is necessarily asso-

-cialized the idea of a universal sen-
-sibility. Matter is alive.

Now to the German monists
also matter is alive. On the
phenomena of cell-physiology,
Haeckel claims to base his con-
-viction that "even the atom is
not without a rudimentary form
of sensation and will, or, as it
is better expressed, of feeling
(aesthesia), and of inclination (tropesis),
— that is to say, a universal soul
of the simplest kind." I may
quote also from Haeckel's "Riddle
of the Universe" the following
paragraph expressing the monistic
notion of substance as held by
Vogt and others:—

2 etc.

Bryce

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Quaker by me
- Lewis

— "The two fundamental forms of substance, ponderable matter and ether, are not dead and only moved by extrinsic forces; but they are endowed with sensation and will (though, naturally, of the lowest grade);— they experience an inclination for condensation, a dislike of strain;— they strive after the one, and struggle against the other."

3/21/11

Less like a revival of the dreams of the Alchemists is the very probable hypothesis of Schneider, that sensibility begins with the formation of certain combinations, — that feeling is evolved from the non-feeling, just as organic being has been evolved from inorganic

substance. + But all these monist ideas enter into surprising combination with the Buddha teaching about matter as degraded Karma; and for that reason they are well worth citing in this relation. To Buddhist conception also matter is sentient, - the sentience varying according to condition: "even rocks and stones," a Japanese Buddhist layman declares, "can worship Buddha". In the German monism of Professor Haeckel's school, the particular qualities and affinities of the atom represent feeling and inclination, "a soul of the simplest kind"; in Buddhism these qualities are made by Karma, - that is to say, they represent tendencies formed in previous states of existence. The hypotheses appear to be very similar. But there is one immense, all-important difference,

between the Occidental and the Oriental
 notions. The former would attri-
 -bute the qualities of the atom
 merely to a sort of heredity, — to
 the persistency of tendencies devel-
 -oped under chance influences
 operating throughout an incalculable
 past. The latter declares the
 history of the atom to be purely
 moral! All matter, according
 to Buddhism, represents aggregated
 tendency, making, by its inherent
 tendencies, toward conditions
 of pain or pleasure, evil or
 good. "Pure acts," writes
 the author of "Outlines of the
 Mahâyâna Philosophy", "bring
 forth the Pure Lands of all
 the quarters of the universe;
 while impure deeds produce the
 Impure Lands." That is to say,

The matter is degraded by the force of moral
 acts goes to the making of blissful
 worlds; and the matter formed by
 the force of immoral acts goes to the
 making of miserable worlds. All
 substance, like all mind, has its
 Karma; planets, like men, are
 shaped by the creative power of act
 and thought; and every atom goes
 to its appointed place, sooner or
 later, according to the moral or
 immoral quality of the tendencies
 that inform it. Your good or bad
 thought or deed will not only affect
 your next rebirth, but will likewise
 affect in some sort the nature of
 worlds yet unevolved, wherein, after
 innumerable cycles, you may have
 to live again. Of course, this
 tremendous idea has no counterpart
 in modern evolutionary philosophy.
 Mr. Spencer's position is well

known; but I must note him for
the purpose of emphasizing the
contrast between Buddhist and
scientific thought:—

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... We have no ethics of
nebular condensation, or
of sidereal movement, or
of planetary evolution;—the
conception is not relevant
to inorganic matter. Nor,
when we turn to organized
things, do we find that
it has any relation to
the phenomena of plant-
-life;—though we ascribe
to plants superiorities and
inferiorities, leading to
successes and failures in
the struggle for existence, we
do not associate with them
praise or blame. It is only
with the rise of sentience in
the animal world that the
subject-matter of ethics ori-
-ginates. — (Principles of Ethics, Vol. II § 326)

Grace 17th
— Lent

3rd

Paper

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On the contrary, it will be seen, Bud-
-dhism actually teaches what we may call,
to borrow Mr. Spence's phrase, "the
ethics of nebular condensation",—though
to Buddhist astronomy, the scientific
meaning of the term "nebular conden-
-sation" was never known. Of course
the hypothesis is beyond the power
of human intelligence to prove or
to disprove. But it is interesting,
for it proclaims a purely moral
order of the cosmos, and attaches
almost infinite consequence to
the least of human acts. Had
the old Buddhist metaphysicians
been acquainted with the facts of
modern chemistry, they might have
applied their doctrine, with appalling
success, to the interpretation of those
facts. They might have explained
the dance of atoms, the affinities
of molecules, the vibrations of ether,
in the most fascinating and terrify-
-ing way by their theory of karma.

... Here is a universe of suggestion, —
most weird suggestion — for anybody
able and willing to dare the experiment
of making a new religion, or at least
a new and demanding system of
Alchemy, based upon the notion of
a moral order in the inorganic world!

$\frac{1}{2}$ line

— But the metaphysics of
Karma in the higher Buddhism
includes much that is harder to
understand than any alchemical
hypothesis of atom-combinations.
As taught by popular Buddhism,
the doctrine of rebirth is simple
enough, — signifying no more than
transmigration; — you have lived
millions of times in the past, and
you are likely to live again millions
of times in the future, — all the
conditions of each rebirth depending

upon past conduct. The common notion is that, after a certain period of bodiless sojourn in this world, the spirit is guided somehow to the place of its next incarnation. The people, of course, believe in souls. But there is nothing of all this in the higher doctrine, which denies transmigration, denies the existence of the soul, denies personality. There is no Self to be reborn; there is no transmigration — and yet there is rebirth! There is no real "I" that suffers or is glad — and yet there is new suffering to be borne or new happiness to be gained! What we call the Self, — the personal consciousness, — dissolves at the death of the body; but the karma, formed during life, then brings about the induration of a new

body, and a new consciousness. You suffer in this existence because of acts done in a previous existence — yet the author of those acts was not identical with your present self! Are you, then, responsible for the faults of another person?

The Buddhist metaphysician would answer thus: — "The frame of your question is wrong, because it assumes the existence of personality, — and there is no personality. There is really no such individual as the 'you' of the inquiry. The suffering is indeed the result of errors committed in some anterior existence or existences; but there is no responsibility for the acts of another person, since there is no personality. The 'I' that was and the 'I' that is represent in the chain of transitory being aggregations momentarily created by acts as thoughts; and the pain belongs to the aggregations as conditions resulting from quality."

All this sounds extremely obscure: to understand the real theory we must put away the notion of personality, which is a very difficult thing to do. Successive births do not mean transmigration in the common sense of that word, but only the self-propagation of karma: the perpetual multiplying of certain conditions by a kind of ghostly gemination, — if I may borrow a biological term. The Buddhist illustration, however, is that of flame communicated from one lamp-wick to another: a hundred lamps may thus be lighted from one flame, and the hundred flames will all be different, though the origin of all was the same. Within the hollow flame of each transitory life is enclosed a part of the only Reality; but this is not a soul that transmigrates. Nothing passes from birth to birth but karma, — character or condition.

One will naturally ask how can such a doctrine exert any moral influence whatever? If the future being shaped by my karma is to be in nowise identical with my present self, — if the future consciousness evolved by my karma is to be essentially another consciousness, — how can I force myself to feel anxious about the sufferings of that unborn person? Again your question is wrong, a Buddhist would answer: to understand the doctrine you must get rid of the notion of individuality, and think, not of persons, but of successive states of feeling and consciousness, each of which buds out of the other, — a chain of existences interdependently united. I may attempt another illustration. Every individual, as we understand the term, is continually changing. All the structures of the body are con-

-standly undergoing waste and repair; and the body that you have at this hour is not, as a substance, the same body that you had ten years ago. Physically you are not the same person: yet you suffer the same pains, and feel the same pleasures, and find your powers limited by the same conditions. Whatever disintegrations and reconstructions of tissue have taken place within you, you have the same physical and mental peculiarities that you had ten years ago. Doubtless the cells of your brain have been decomposed and recombined: yet you experience the same emotions, recall the same memories, and think the same thoughts. Everywhere the fresh substance has assumed the qualities and tendencies of the substance replaced. This

persistence of condition is like Karma,
The transmission of tendency remains
though the aggregate is changed...

O'Leary

— These few glimpses into the
fantastic world of Buddhist metaphysics
will suffice, I trust, to convince any
intelligent reader that the higher
Buddhism (to which belongs the much
discussed and little comprehended
doctrine of Nirvāna) could never
have been the religion of millions
almost incapable of forming abstract
ideas, — the religion of a population
even yet in a comparatively early
stage of religious evolution. It was
never understood by the people at
all, nor is it ever taught to them
today. It is a religion of meta-
-physicians, or religion of scholars,
a religion so difficult to be understood,

even by persons of some philosophical
 training that it might well be mis-
 -taken for a system of universal
 negation. Yet the reader should
 now be able to perceive that, because
 a man disbelieves in a personal God,
 in an immortal soul, and in any
 continuation of personality after death,
 it does not follow that we are
 justified in declaring him an
 irreligious person, - especially if he
 happen to be an Oriental. The
 Japanese scholar who believes in
 the moral order of the universe,
 the ethical responsibility of the
 present to all the future, the
 immeasurable consequences of every
 thought and deed, the ultimate
 disparition of evil, and the
 power of attainment to conditions
 of infinite memory and infinite
 vision, - cannot be termed either

an atheist or a materialist, except
by bigotry and ignorance. Profound
as may be the difference between
his religion and our own, in respect
of symbols and modes of thought,
the moral conclusions reached in
either case are very much the
same.

