

The worst feature about sin—*e.g.*, lying or stealing—is to be caught at it. Hence the degradation and utterly corrupt moral condition of even the priesthood, so that a few years ago the government found itself constrained to give warning that the priests must reform, or punishment must be meted out to them—something never before known in the history of the nation. And if such is the moral, or rather immoral, condition of the shepherds (as even the Buddhist papers bewailingly assure us), what must needs be the condition of the flock?

But even this, though of deep significance, is not yet the worst. Buddhism does have some vague conception of sin and its final punishment. Pictures of paradise, of hell, and judgment are on sale, and the representations of the latter are certainly awful enough; but its devotees know nothing of a personal Saviour from sin, of effectual repentance, pardon, peace, and a joyous salvation. Only through the Gospel do they learn the words and power of the song:

“I have a Saviour, He’s pleading in glory,
A dear, loving Saviour, though earth-friends be few.”

The priests tell us (and statements in this article are based on conversations with priests and observations of the people rather than on books) that a man may, by reading the Buddhist books, become sufficiently free from evil desires to become a Buddha—*i.e.*, attain to perfect happiness before or at death. But when asked whether any one, as a matter of fact, did really attain to such a state in this life, he could think of but one living priest who was so far perfected that he was entirely free from the desire to steal and the like. Thus it is evident the prospects, the hope of deliverance from sin, even among the priests, is extremely small. And what, then, of the laity? It is only through the Gospel that the dark night of despair has been illuminated and filled with hope. Buddha, or Sakya Muni, did not die for the sins of the people. Christ did, and Christianity offers, in place of the unattainable and scarcely desirable ideal of salvation by works, that by faith—present, positive, perfect, free—Christianity has, moreover, given to Japan the best literature of which the Bible is the foundation-stone. The best of foreign missionary and Japanese talent had been for a long time engaged on the work of translation, and by the best Japanese scholars the Bible in the vernacular is pronounced one of the best translations of any book in the language. The various Bible societies, with the co-operation of missionaries and colporteurs, are doing a grand work in spreading the Bible. The Japan Scripture Union proposes as one of its objects, to give every man in the country, who is able to read, an opportunity of possessing the Bible for himself. The Christian Physicians’ Society of 70 members proposes distributing the Bible among the 40,000 physicians of the empire and the 1000 new men who annually enter the medical ranks. Until the funds permit giving the whole Bible, the Gospel of Luke will be distributed. This work has already been begun, and is now being carried on.