

THE RELIGIONS OF THE ORIENT.

Extracts of an address by Rev. Jacob Chamberlain, M.D. D.D., at Clifton Springs.

THE distinguishing characteristic of the religion of Jesus, which differentiates it from all the other religions in the world, is found in that unique personality unveiled to us in the declarations of Holy Writ: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" "He was wounded for our transgressions: . . . the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." "And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."

This is the key—this Son of God bearing our sin; this great High Priest touched with the feeling of infirmities; this God-man stretching his hand of love far down to us, to help us up. It is this that causes Christianity to stand out among the world's religions alone, without a peer or second.

The great religions of the world do agree in much. They all teach more or less distinctly that the Godhead is one, and that He is Holy, good and pure; that man is in a state of sin, not at peace with Holy God, and that man is in dire need of purity and holiness; that there can be no peace, no harmony between sinful man and Holy God until and unless sin is in some way expiated or expurgated; that this getting rid of sin and sin's consequences, this search for purity and holiness, this obtaining of conformity with God, is the greatest and most worthy end of ~~man's~~ existence. But not one of the religions of the world, save Christianity, the religion of Jesus, furnishes any help *outside of ourselves* for the accomplishment of this stupendous task.

Call the roll of the famed religions of the Orient, over some of which it is in certain circles now the fashion to go into ecstasies, vaunting them as the equals, or promising rivals of Christianity; call the roll, and see what is the highest and noblest they can teach us.

The Zend Avesta of the Parsis, dating back to almost prehistoric times, bids its adherents believe in Ormuzd, the spirit of good, and shun the machinations of Ahriman, the spirit of Evil, and bids

them prove their belief, not by words, but by actions—"avoiding [I quote from its S S.] all arrogance and envy, all lying and slander, all unchastity, magic and vice of any kind." "Keep thyself pure," both body and soul, is its Christlike injunction. But for expulsion of the evil thoughts and passions which have entered the heart, and for the eradication of our sinful desires, it gives no other help than open confession to a priest of the sins committed and the evil desires entertained, with the proper fulfillment of such penances as he enjoins. "Thyself must expiate thine own sins" is the best cheer it can give the sin-burdened soul.

Confucius, born in the Province of Shantung, China, 551 B.C., was the founder of a system which still controls the lives and actions of nearly one-fourth of the human race. In the scriptures which he left, and which, after two and one-half millenniums, are still the guide of millions of Chinamen, one can find the most beautiful moral maxims, the choicest exhortations to purity and nobleness of life. Passages remind one of the sublime precepts of Moses, of the glowing exhortations of Paul. But, in seeking to attain to this excellence, he gave his disciples no hope of any superhuman aid; indeed he distinctly taught: "To give one's self earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them—this may be called wisdom." One must aim at purity and holiness and excellence, but must rely solely on his own unaided efforts to attain thereto—hopeless task for sin-fettered man.

Five years before Confucius, or 556 B.C., was Gautama, afterwards known as Sakya Muni, or The Buddha, born near Benares, India. The son of the King of Kapilavastu, delicately nourished and educated by Brahman preceptors, at twenty-nine years of age he left court and wife and kingly station, and repaired to the forest to live the life of an ascetic. For six years, accompanied by five disciples, he lived so austere that he was wasted to a shadow.

At last he announced that his desires were accomplished; that he had seen beatific visions; that all heavenly knowledge had been revealed to him. From that time he assumed the title of the Buddha—that is, The One Who Knows, the enlightened one—and began to promulgate the system known as Buddhism, which gained acceptance for a time over all India, and, propagated by its missionaries,