

A VISIT TO A BUDDHIST MONASTERY.

FROM OUR JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT.



On the 28th of April I paid a visit to a Buddhist monastery, a short account of which I trust will not prove uninteresting.

One of my Keiogijuku students, Nishiyama, is a priest of the Nichiren sect of Buddhists (one of the advantages of my position at a secular college is that I am thus brought into contact with a class of people not very accessible to ordinary missionaries), and he has been very kindly showing me a good many things connected with his sect. I may perhaps add that I have been composing a poem lately on the very romantic life of the founder of the sect, Nichiren, a Buddhist reformer of the early part of the thirteenth century.

Nishiyama lives at a Buddhist seminary not very far from my house and, as there are about a hundred priests there training for the Buddhist university, I thought it would be an interesting thing to enquire into the methods they pursue for training their candidates. A Buddhist priest commences his training young, and the Nichiren sect have three grades of schools. In the first grade school, which is at a place called *Hori no uchi*, a country monastery about five miles from here, boys enter as soon as they have finished the course of the ordinary common schools, i.e., at about fifteen or sixteen. In this school, which I have seen, there are about thirty boys under training, who are taught a little mathematics and the general outlines of Buddhism. From this school, where they generally spend three years, the students are passed on to the middle-grade priests' school at Ikegami, another country monastery also about five miles from here. They are then, after three years more, brought to the college at Takanawa, close to my house, where they receive a still further course of training, the more promising amongst them being further permitted to attend lectures at the secular colleges for special purposes. This is how it happens that Nishiyama comes to my lectures at the Keiogijuku for a course of English literature. Possibly, that means that he is learning English with a view to combating Christianity the better; but I have never asked him.

The course of study at these colleges seems to be somewhat as follows: Matins (if I may use the term) from 5 to 6, followed by breakfast. Lectures from 8 to 12. Dinner at 12, followed, at *Hori no uchi*, at least, by a service of reading the Scriptures (which, by the way, the boys did not attend). Evensong from 5 to 6, followed by supper, and then private study.

I have been asked to go to matins, but have not yet managed to get there. It is a little early to turn out. But this afternoon I looked

in at their evensong, and this, I think, will prove of interest.

The temple is almost square. I give a rough diagram which will give you some idea of its general arrangement.

A is the principal altar, over which, in glass cases, are gilt images of ten Buddhas, who are all supposed to be so many incarnations of one and the same original Buddha or spirit of the universe. On this altar there were two candles and two lamps burning during the service, and vases of flowers. A' A' side altars with idol of Sakya Nuni on one side, and Nichiren on the other.

B is a sort of secondary altar, with nothing on it but two candlesticks and two vases of artificial lotus flowers. C is the abbot's seat, facing the altar; at D D were seats for the professors of the college. E E were rows of pillars, outside of which the laity sit on the mats when there is a sermon or great service. F F are the students' seats arranged as at the college chapel at Trinity—the freshmen sit on the front row.

G is the almsbox, three feet long, two feet high, and one foot broad.

The service itself was very confusing at first, but after it was explained to me I saw that it was in theory very simple. After a prostration or two, the abbot intoned the formula of the sect, which was taken up in a dull, monotonous chant by the choir of students. "I believe in Buddha! I believe in the Law! I believe in the Church!" (Buddha's, of course.) "I take refuge in Buddha, the Law, and the Church." After this and one or two other similar phrases expressive of a belief in the presence of the Buddhas and of honor to the Scriptures had been repeated several times, the whole choir began the recitation of the Scriptures. In the Nichiren sect they read only one holy book, called the Lotus of the Good Law, and they read a chapter of it at every service, all reading together and aloud, whilst one of the professors marked time with a drum. This part of the service was very long and very monotonous, but I made good use of my time, as I squatted in my corner, by taking out my own Prayer Book, and saying my evensong with such additional petitions as could not fail to come from the heart of a Christian priest attending a service of this kind.

When the reading of the Scripture was over the abbot sounded his little gong, and recited some prayers, during which everybody rubbed his rosary very diligently. He then went up and took his position between the two altars, where he offered up a kind of intercession, or rather a declaration of his determination to love all mankind in accordance with the teachings of the Buddhas; and after this was ended there was a general prostration, and all was over.

My rambles amongst these Buddhist temples have given me much food for thought.

I have seemed to understand more clearly, what I think was before very clear in my mind, the need of a long training for the Christian ministry. The child Samuel is our model, and boyhood is the time when that training should

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