

Can the Missionary Keep the Orient From Turning Back to Buddha?

The San Francisco SUNDAY MAGAZINE SECTION —PART I— CALL SEPTEMBER 25 1910



THE discovery, recently in India, of a tiny casket of dull gray metal built in the shape of a blooming lotus flower, and said authoritatively to incase the ashes of the great teacher Buddha, founder of the Buddhist faith, which has a following of 150,000,000 people, threatens to undo, especially in Japan and China, the teachings that for years have been spread through the orient by missionaries of the Chinese church.

Devotees of the mystic faith and long robed priests of Buddha are conducting quietly, without ostentation, yet with alarming success, a tremendous revival in both these countries and in India converts are flocking to the Buddhist temples daily and prostrating themselves before the placid faced images that represent the faith.

Already preparations are being made in England and this country to combat the effect of this latest relic of Buddha by the sending abroad of new corps of missionaries.

The movement toward the revival of Buddhism has reached large proportions only in China and Japan. In India, where Buddha lived, there was before the discovery of the relics not one Buddhist in 1,000 natives.

The discovery of the ashes of the

great leader took place near Peshawur in Afghanistan.

The relics, which have been declared authentic, were presented to those of Buddhist faith by the British authorities in India.

According to the accounts which have come from India, the discovery was the work of a Frenchman named Foucher, who came into India to study Buddhism. He found manuscripts which told of the burial of Buddha's ashes under a huge pagoda in the mountain fastnesses of Peshawur.

Although the scientist, Foucher, undertook to locate the tower and did so, the British authorities were called to his aid. The ruins of the tower were located two years ago, and indicate from their size that the edifice which stood there was larger than any known Buddhist pagoda. For nearly a year and a half excavations were made before the relic chamber was found, 20 feet below the stone floor of the pagoda. The room was stone walled and small and was built, according to archaeologists, all of 2,400 years ago.

A bronze casket seven inches high and five inches in diameter was in the center of the chamber. The casket was round, lidged and fashioned to represent a full blown lotus flower, upon which a small bronze Buddha sat. The



THE GREAT BRONZE STATUE OF BUDDHA AT KAMAKURA, JAPAN.

box was wonderfully carved with scenes depicting the life of Buddha. A lump of rock crystal was found within the casket. One end had been hollowed out and sealed, but the seal had fallen away with the ravages of time. Inside the cavity were a patch of whitish ashes and two bits of charred bone. The relics are considered genuine beyond all peradventure by the British authorities.

The favorite image of Buddha, before whom the groping, half heathen souls in Burma, Siam, Japan and China are bowing, is the "sitting Buddha," which depicts the teacher during his period of meditation under the Bo tree at Buddha Gay, about 125 miles from Benares.

At this point, the legend goes, Buddha sat for six years in penance and mortification.

He became a living skeleton, was naked and covered with dirt and was soon the object of contempt in the surrounding villages. Angas and devils tempted him. Hydra headed demons

fired volleys of poisoned arrows at him, but before they could pierce him they fell as lotus flowers at his feet. Throngs of beautiful women, from girlhood to maturity, came before him, but they were powerless against him.

The effect of the big Buddhist revival in the far east is being felt in this country in a peculiar fashion. Some of our most prominent society women have become so interested in its progress that they have started the fashion of collecting images of the god of the orientals. Some of the women who are the most ardent of the collectors declare that, while they are not converts to the faith, they are given certain solace by the presence in their boudoirs of the restful figure of the sitting Buddha or the reclining Buddha, portrayed as entering Nirvana, and that the image of the preaching Buddha gives them new hopes for the future.

Mrs. William Crane, wife of Senator Crane of Massachusetts; Mrs. Clarence Moore, Mrs. Franklin Ellis and many other widely known American women are enthusiastic collectors of the images.

Buddhas range from the tiny ivory amulet, which one may purchase from the fakery at Atlantic City, of little worth or value, to the great golden sleeping Buddha of Siam, 150 feet long, before which thousands of half clad brown men and women creep daily. Yet the finer examples, many of which stand in palatial residences of

Washington millionaires, sell for good prices. Hundreds of dollars are some of them bring.

A prominent clergyman recently in discussing the great spread of the old faith declared that unless redoubled effort is made at once by foreign missionaries the effect of the discovery of Buddha's ashes will undo years of work. Concerning the effect of the discovery in this country and the fad of collecting images, he said:

"There are lots of things which come into the United States without a shadow of moral right to justify their presence, and the Buddhas are the most notable example. Forty or fifty years ago many were imported. The presence of so many of the smaller Japanese Buddhas here is easily explained. The little gods were hung in their black lacquered cases in front of the doorways of the Japanese homes. Sailors on shore leave would go through a village and despoil whole streets.

"Then, too, a Buddha is distinctly a church adjunct in the orient. Where in civilized countries memorial windows are placed in churches, in China, Japan and India Buddhas are placed in the temple as memorials to the illustrious dead. Most often, with the connivance of a priest, these little images were taken from their niches and sold. Really good examples of Buddhas are now becoming scarce."



STONE BUDDHAS BEFORE A TEMPLE AT NAGASAKI



BUDDHIST PRIEST EXPUNING THE LIFE OF BUDDHA