
SPARKS FROM THE MAGAZINES

WILL BUDDHISM COME TO THE FRONT?

Prof. T. W. Rhys Davids in The North American Review.

It would be blindness to omit in any estimate of the position of Buddhism as a living force—it is not at all improbable that it may turn out, eventually, to be the most important point of all—the quiet but irresistible way in which Buddhism is making its influence felt, quite apart from any religious propaganda, in the thought of the West. What Schopenhauer said has often been quoted, but will bear quoting again: "If I am to take the results of my own philosophy as the standard of truth, I should be obliged to concede to Buddhism the pre-eminence over the rest. In any case, it must be a satisfaction to me to find my teaching in such agreement with a religion professed by the majority of men." This would be neither the place nor the time to undertake any discussion of this utterance. It is enough to point out that Schopenhauer is, in all probability, the most influential philosopher among those now followed in Germany; and that the influence of Germany, at all events in intellectual matters, is at present, if not indeed in the ascendant, at least exceedingly powerful. It is not probable that any considerable number of people, either in Europe or America, will ever range themselves openly on the side of Buddhism, as a profession of faith. But it cannot be denied that there are certain points in the Buddhist view of life that are likely to influence, and to influence widely, with increasing intensity, the views of life, of philosophy, of ethics, as held now in the West. And not only the view of life, the method also, the system of self-training in ethical culture, has certain points which the practical Western mind is not likely, when it comes to know it, to ignore. The present results have been brought about by the knowledge of Buddhism professed by a few isolated students. It is only when the texts have been properly edited, fully translated, so studied and summarized that they have been made accessible to every one interested in questions of philosophy and ethics, that the full power of such truth as there is in the Buddhist theory will be felt.

It cannot be considered as at all improbable that the twentieth century will see a movement of ideas not unlike in importance to that resulting from the discovery of Greek thought at the time of the Renaissance, and due, like it, to the meeting together in men's minds of two fundamentally different interpretations of the deepest problems man has to face.