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COLLECTANEA.

A BUDDHIST WHEEL OF LIFE FROM JAPAN.

THE picture of which the frontispiece is a reduced reproduction, was given to me by my friend Professor Anesaki of Tokio, at present resident in Kiel. In the description of it which appeared in *Man* (January, 1901), was included a translation, by the late Mr. T. Watters, of the Chinese text at the foot of the picture. It will not be necessary therefore to do more here than supply a key to the picture, and call attention to the points interesting to folklorists.

Commencing with the nave, we find Buddha seated in the centre (the white circle showing perhaps that he is supposed to be outside the wheel; on the other hand it may be that the corporeal Buddha is regarded as a part of the illusion of this world, and therefore placed within the wheel); in the yellow circle are a dove, a serpent, and a pig, emblematic of evil cravings, malice, and stupidity. In the body of the wheel, which is conceived as continually revolving, are five "Resorts," or "Ways of Life"—Hell at the bottom, in a very simplified form, however, and hardly suggestive of the *Inferno* of Dante, or likely to have given him ideas for it; at the top is Yama, god of the dead, and on either side of him good and bad angels; below are the various punishments—on the right the hot hell, in the centre a person having his (or perhaps her) tongue torn out, a requital reserved for slanderers; on the extreme left we have perhaps the cold hell, and above it a person is held by the hair by a demon before a mirror to see his or her sins in it; the actual occurrence in the mirror seems to be a murder, committed by hurling the victim over a precipice.

In the next Resort we have the tantalised ghosts. The details are here unfortunately not sufficiently clear in the original to make a good picture. The tantalised ghosts are here represented as emaciated human beings, who, when they endeavour to eat and drink, find that everything which they touch turns to fire. They are elsewhere represented with large stomachs, mouths the size of

a pinhole, throats the size of a hair; this detail in the picture is Japanese.

The other three Ways of Life explain themselves; it may, however, be noted that in the "Resort of Man" there are four continents. Of these the Eastern one is that of "Men," *i.e.* the Chinese in this case, who apparently, like so many other peoples, apply this term to themselves *par excellence*. In the north we should find the country of horses, but what is actually represented is a man engaged in binding sheaves. It is not clear how this feature comes into the picture. The Gilyaks who live north of the Amur get their corn by exchange from the Chinese; it is true they formerly cultivated millet, and the picture may refer to this; for though drawn by a native of Japan it is clearly almost entirely under the influence of Chinese ideas. The original name—country of horses—seems equally to demand explanation; the term can hardly refer to the present neighbours of the Chinese. It would be interesting to learn how far back the name can be traced and how far there is a historical basis for it.

The same remark applies to the country on the west—the country of oxen; it is difficult to see how this can refer to any period except one antecedent to the introduction of the ox in North China, where it is employed in ploughing; and even then it is not clear to what neighbours it refers; the nomadic hordes of Central Asia would surely be too far away.

On the rim are buckets containing human beings, some disappearing head downwards typifying death, *i.e.* passing out of one form of existence, and others emerging head upwards, typifying birth, *i.e.* entering upon a new form of existence; the buckets are naturally at the end of the spokes which divide the "Ways of Life." The whole is held in the grasp of the great Demon of Impermanency, who is, unlike many of the figures, of a thoroughly Japanese type. It is interesting to note that he has points of connection with the mediæval Devil. The white circle of *Nirvāna* is at the top of the picture. The small figures round the wheel are typical of the twelve *Nidānas*, or Causes of Existence. There are eighteen pictures, five going to the twelfth *Nidāna* and three to the eleventh. The series commences with (1) the demon in the centre (typifying ignorance), then follow (2) a wheel (elemental matter), (3) a monkey (consciousness), (4) a man crossing a stream (perhaps the rise of self-consciousness),

(5) a naked man (the senses), (6) a man and woman in contact, (7) figures typifying pain and pleasure, (8) a woman with children (affection), (9) a man drawing water, (10) the God Brahma (existence), (11) three stages of life, and finally (12) scenes typifying pain and sorrow. The meaning is very often doubtful, and I therefore pass over some of the scenes without suggesting what they typify.

As I have elsewhere pointed out, we see in the three-headed figure representing Brahmā a small head above the other three; this is usually a feature of the images of Avalokita, who was in later times depicted with several heads; in view of the capricious nature, however, of Japanese art in these respects it is a question what is really intended.

The first scene of the twelfth *Nidāna* represents a funeral; on the bier supported by the bearers is a *Swastika*, for which we have in English no popular name like the German "Hakenkreuz." There does not seem to be any significance attached in the Far East to the direction of the bent arms of this emblem, which as here depicted is left-handed. I am not quite sure what meaning we should attach to it here. In China it is the custom to have it on the grave-clothes, prepared many years before the person expects to die, when its influence is supposed to conduce to longevity. This can hardly be the case here unless it is the living who are to reap the benefit of it. On the other hand there is no reason to regard it as merely decorative in its object.

The picture was the work of the grandfather of Professor Anesaki; it is dated 1850. There is another picture of the same sort in existence in Japan, dated a few years earlier. It seems very probable that both go back to a Chinese original of great age, but of this I have so far no proof. The details of three of the Resorts are distinctly old Chinese. I hope at a future period to be able to give the whole history of the picture.

N. W. THOMAS.

STRAY NOTES ON JAPANESE FOLKLORE.

The following notes of Japanese superstitions were communicated to me at various times in the course of conversation on European folklore, by Professor Anesaki of Tokio.