

A MUSEUM OF RELIGIONS



BY ADA CONE



NOTABLE effort to realise the ideal museum has been made at Paris by the *musée Guimet*. This museum

exists for the illustration of a single study, and the objects are arranged, not for display or for picturesque effect, but for the ordered development of the subject. The result is of considerable interest.

The *musée Guimet* is a museum for the study of comparative religions; Asiatic religions in particular and those of antiquity, but also in general of all religions, and the folklore bearing upon them, that lie outside Judaism and Christianity. In this museum therefore a statue is not simply a statue by such an artist of such a date; it stands for a mode of thought; each case represents a dogma, a belief, a sect; and the catalogue is not a mere list of numbered objects, it is a collection of studies to explain the ideas the objects represent.

The treasures of art and learning gathered here bear more especially upon the Orient, and comprise original monuments precious by age, by material, by the ideas they illustrate, above all by their intelligent classification. They include objects of cult: models of temples, ancient sacred manuscripts, and—a peculiar feature of the museum

—a reconstitution of scenes, with life-sized models, in the costumes and character of the people they represent. Besides all this, and apart from its main object, the museum contains the most considerable and most valuable collection of Chinese and Japanese secular art now available to the Parisian public; but these objects are in galleries apart.

In the museum's library are 22,000 volumes of print and of Oriental manuscripts, sacred books written on palm leaves that open out like the leaves of a fan, woven in silk, cut on pebbles, all catalogued in the languages in which they are written and in French. A strange library. It holds among other things a grammar of the old Sanscrit preserved in the temples of Japan, followed with an explanation of the mystic sense of the Sanscrit characters; the first document of the kind ever brought to Europe or published there.

This collection, which no State could bring together today with time or money, was

formed by a single man in a space of time relatively short. In 1876, M. Guimet went to the East, charged by the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts with a mission of ethnographic and religious study. At the end of a year he came back dominated



DHARMA RETURNED FROM THE DEAD.

Japanese Buddhism?

by an idea which was to absorb all his intellectual life, the archæological reconstitution of Asiatic religions. His plans were methodically laid. He left behind him in the East established relations with priests of various cults, and he brought with him innumerable cases of objects relative to Oriental beliefs; from Japan alone three hundred religious pictures, six hundred divine statues and a thousand volumes of Japanese literature bearing on religion. It was not a commonplace baggage. And besides these treasures he was accompanied by some young native priests from Ceylon, who had consented to teach and to interpret Sanscrit in the school he designed to found in Lyons, his native city. All this with his own private purse, for the Government had not charged him to form a museum.

M. Guimet sat down in solitude among his manuscripts and sacred objects to study. There the learned of the earth soon found him out. His correspondence grew; his collection grew—and he realised that Lyons was too provincial a town to permit such an establishment to render the services it ought. In 1888, then, he offered the State the entire collection with all that he should afterwards add to it, on condition that the Government should move it to Paris, provide the ground and half the cost of a building, with an allowance for heating and service, asking to reserve for himself only the title of director for life. The State accepted with alacrity, as may be imagined, for the collection was valued at three million francs.

The man who has thus endowed his

country with a useful institution and the first museum of religions ever created, is the son of the chemist who invented artificial indigo. This chemical "blue" could be sold ten times cheaper than natural indigo, and its inventor left a fortune of three million francs to his son.

This fortune M. Guimet spent to form the initial museum, but the wheels of the bluing factory turn as busily as in the time of his father, to furnish this singular heir his bread and butter, to pay also for incessant additions to enrich the museum, and for frequent researches, such as those which at Antinöe have yielded such interesting results. And this man, poring over Sanscrit texts, stoop-shouldered before his time, who, with a pride all made of philosophy, dares to place in the library of this beautiful monument a calendar with the legend, "Guimet Bluing," is one of the best examples of civic virtue the Republic has produced. Let us examine a little the work he is trying to do.

Asiatic religions, too long neglected by the West, have been abhorred because heathenish, till by dint of knowing nothing about them we have come to look upon them as incomprehensible. On the other hand, the people who practise them know very little more about them than we do. Thus in southern India, where there are splendid temples and the cult is very pure, the priests can give no account of the history of their religion. Asiatics either have no literature and so no written history, or else they have a literature that is not consecutive and so have a history, or rather a tradition, which is full



CHINESE PRIEST OFFERING INCENSE.
From the Painting by M. Felix Regamey.



CHINESE BRONZE OF THE 18TH CENTURY.
Buddha Penitent.

in this case there is no more precious material for reconstituting their history than a study of their religious beliefs, an amalgam of these myths. This is particularly true for the rich mine of ancient history which lies in Asia still unexplored. It is the discovery of this lost history of the world which M. Guimet is trying to make.

His plan was to begin with Buddhism, for this is the religion most widely spread and which furnishes the most abundant literature. Wherever Buddhism has gone it has absorbed the local religion which have preceded it; the sun worship, the fetishism, and these more primitive religions in their turn may be analysed, taking the student farther and farther back into the night of time.

While a body of scientists are thus at work in connection with the Guimet museum on this analysis of Asiatic religions, other specialists are making active researches round the borders of the Mediterranean, analysing the complicated Olympus, and discovering new facts about the more ancient Pelagic, Phœnician and Etruscan religions

of breaks. And whatever their beliefs about themselves may be, they are based, not on a scientific observation of laws unknown to them, but on a blind observation of the phenomena of nature, and are embedded in myths.

For a people

which have entered into it. The same thing is being done for Egypt. The Egyptian Isis and Osiris have been traced to Rome and into Gaul. M. Guimet himself has established beyond debate the traces of the cult of Isis at Lyons, in France.

The Christian religion enters in no way into this work, but the museum has not refused a number of studies offered by Christian clergymen on curious Christian sects; on Manicheism, on Gnosticism; and there hang in the picture gallery of the rotunda illustrations of some exceptional modern sects. Thus a rite in the Oneida community, a baptism of Indians by Mormons, make a curious effect side by side with pictures of Buddhist vespers in the

temple of Nikko, of the sacrifice to the spirit of the earth at Hong Kong. These pictures with the rest of the interesting collection in the museum were made by the artist, M. Felix Regamey, who has been M. Guimet's companion in his travels, and who has made studies all over the world.

The collected studies of the Guimet museum yield from two to four volumes a year, and are published under the title of *Annales du Musée Guimet*. The museum publishes



PROTECTING GODDESS OF CHILDREN,
Japanese Buddhism.

also a bi-monthly magazine, called the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, to which contribute such men as Maspero, Albert and J. Reville, Lenormant, and the scholarly director of the museum, de Milloué.



BUDDHA.
Bronze from Birmanya.

Thus a veritable army of learned men are at work, preparing materials destined to constitute later a stupendous monument, "The History of Human Thought." And now the reader has the whole of M. Guimet's idea, and must agree that this work aims high, and that it is not exaggeration to call the museum which stands as a picture-book for it unique in the world.

The museum building is on the Place d'Iena. It is three stories high, built round a triangular open court, and has a round tower at one angle which serves on the first floor for entrance gallery, and on the second and third, finished together, for library and picture gallery. Not to fatigue the reader by showing him all the wonders collected here, we may take a look through the Asiatic section, which occupies the second floor.

The triangular plan of the galleries serves well this exhibit, by permitting the visitor to follow the consecutive development of Buddhism from its point of departure, India—whence it has entirely disappeared, driven out by Brahminism—through Thibet, China, Indo-China, to Japan, where it finds in some respects its highest and most modern development, and to find Japan close to India, the starting point, for easy comparison. Along with this development of Buddhism are seen the various original cults it has engulfed and their influences on the dominant religion.

In the first galleries India unrolls its naive thoughts about Deity and a hereafter. The series is opened by a marvellous sculpture in black basalt, Vishnu floating upon the ocean of chaos, before the birth of Brahma and the beginning of the world. In sculptured wood, fragments of ruin pass one after the other, the heroes and scenes of the Râmâyana and the Mahâbhârata, the curious tribulations of Soma, the moon-god, and his twenty-seven wives, and all the monstrous incarnations of

many heads and many hands, sole means of a primitive people to express power and many attributes.

There are bronze statuettes precious by time and by art; there is an elephant-headed god of science in massive silver; there is a model of the "temple of silence" at Bombay, and, shown for the first time to profane Western eyes, a Parsee rite in the worship of fire.

The scant remains of Buddhism in India

merge into the living Buddhism of Java, strongly mixed with Brahminism, and we arrive at the Buddhism of the Thibetans, whose creative fancy has been equal to the portrayal of "the thousand Buddhas of the ten worlds"; and also to the representation of the entire universe in a single model. This sacred object is one of the most curious things in the museum. From out of the midst of a gilded plain rises mount Merou with the dwellings of the gods at the top. On the plain are figured the four great continents, and between are disposed in circles the four treasures of the world, the seven things precious, the eight goddess mothers and the three protecting Buddhas of the world. This object serves as an offering of the universe which the Lamas make to Buddha every morning.

In China, Buddhism has known how, with an astonishing suppleness, to absorb all the legends

of the native Taoism, and to lend the pomp and brilliance of its ceremonies to the cult of the dead. *A propos* of this cult, M. Guimet likes to relate that he once went from San Francisco to China on a steamer which carried three hundred live Chinamen and four hundred dead ones. Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, the Chinese may be said to profess all three religions at once, and the administration of the museum has done wonders to class this multitude of



CEYLON PRIEST AT COLOMBO.
From the Painting by M. Felix Regamey.

gods, and demons, spirits of the sky, the earth, the sea, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, the provinces, the towns, and the villages.

The Chinese section holds treasures of great art and great price, statuettes in faience, and jewelled bronzes. There is a bronze of the last century representing Buddha (Cakya-Mouni) as a penitent, which is a masterpiece. He ate, says the legend, but a single grain of rice at a meal. He carries a bowl to receive alms, and is draped in a winding sheet he has taken from a corpse to make of it his first religious dress. There is an extraordinary bronze of Dharma returning from the dead, with eyes of crystal which seem to hold the secrets of the hereafter in their cavernous depths.

In Burma and Siam the cult of Buddha passes for being particularly free from local superstitions; in Gamboge it is impregnated with Brahmanism; in Annam and Tonquin it is amalgamated with Chinese local superstitions; all of which, by the clearness of the arrangement, the visitor may see. This section of Indō-China will perhaps have more novelty for the visitor than any other in his promenade. It is particularly rich in the reconstitutions mentioned above, showing rites of ancestor worship, of the cult of the dead, and so on. There are models of tombs, of temples, of strange objects of cult.



CONFUCIUS.
A Chinese Painted Statue.

There is a Burmese mannikin lying in state, used to replace the dead during the funeral services of priests, a ceremony which lasts eight or ten days. But what is most notable artistically is a collection of statues and statuettes of priests and holy personages, of beautiful work

and of noble character. These figures are of painted wood, and are of a workmanship entirely new to the West.

The native and official religion of Japan, Shintoism, scarcely lends itself to art. With its simple rites, its temples without images, and its veiled sanctuary which holds only a mirror of polished metal, it is, no more than our Protestantism, a religion to make a show in a museum,



THE GOD CIVA, AND THE GODDESS PARVATI, IN THE ACT OF ADORING THE LINGA. Brahmanism, India.



M. ÉMILE GUIMET.
Founder of the Guimet Museum.

and it takes in fact very little place there. In Buddhism, on the other hand, Japanese art found its opportunity. In the innumerable Buddhas, in the rich vestments of the priests, in the eight hells whose details of torture exceed imagination, on all this they have brought to bear their refined fancy and delicate taste.

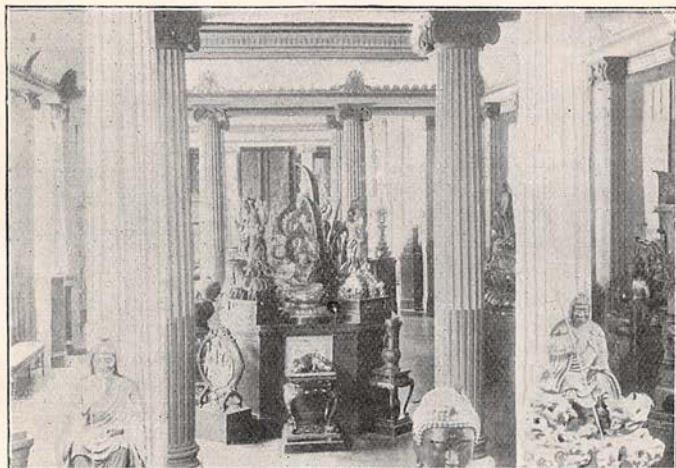
The Japanese department offers, in fact, a complete synthesis of Buddhist philosophy. In the midst sits colossal the supreme and eternal Buddha, surrounded by the eight lesser Buddhas, his emanations, representing each a moral attribute, by the five prophets, also his emanations, charged to bring men to well doing by good counsels, and, finally, by the more respectable of the genus demon, charged to bring men to well doing by constant physical harassment. This *Mandara*, as it is called, is a reproduction of that in the temple of Kiota, and was made under the eye of the great priest there especially for the museum.

There was a Buddhist mass the other day at the Guimet museum. It drew together, as such occasions do, scholars and literary amateurs, in particular those men whose passionate study is all given to wake the Orient from its mysterious sleep and to

snatch the secrets from dead centuries. In this heathen sanctuary, called by the priests in Indo-China and Japan "the great temple," surrounded by strange idols in the midst of a modern city, a priest intoned prayers in the long dead language of a far off ancestry.

Paris could hardly serve up an emotion more curious than held the privileged spec-

tators of this scene. The western light fell down upon the idols; the incense smoked before the Pagan altar, it curled round the lotus petals with a caress as soft as if it enveloped the foot of the cross, seeming thus to say that to nature all humanity is one, whatever its errors. And the great golden Buddha, symbol of the eternal enigma, looked down with his inscrutable smile.



JAPANESE GALLERY IN THE GUIMET MUSEUM.

CALVARY.

Sometimes I see—as when the lightning fills
 With lurid fire the features of a plain—
 The three gaunt crosses, like the brand of Cain,
 Looming above the circuit of the hills.
 Availing as the fallen blood, that thrills
 The parching herbage with a purple stain,
 His blood, whose passage through incarnate pain,
 Has healed us of immeasurable ills.

Dear dying Christ, my stricken heart has found
 Something of solace in that Thou hast said :
 "Father, forgive them." For my hands are red,
 My brother's blood cries to me from the ground,
 And I, an outcast, tread life's weary round ;
 Ah, Christ, can even I be comforted ?

AURELIAN.