

# GUESTS OF THE BUDDHA<sup>1</sup>

## TEMPLE LIFE IN THE WESTERN HILLS BEYOND PEKING

BY JULIET BREEDON

WE are guests of Buddha at his temple of the 'Great Awakening.' During the Middle Ages in Europe visitors were lodged at the monasteries, and the same custom persists to this day in China. It is a charming custom, and a great convenience in little towns and villages, where the native inns are unspeakable. Furthermore, when the season of great heat comes, it allows the foreign colony of Peking to enjoy cool and peaceful retreats in the gray-timbered sanctuaries that nestle on the slopes of the Western Hills not far from the capital. Many a diplomat accepts Buddha as his host in the summer months. Many a treaty has been informally discussed between Legation colleagues, many a romance between fair-haired 'heretics' budded, under the inscrutable eyes of a gilded image of Maitreya.

For ourselves, we rent the guest-rooms of the 'Great Awakening' much as one would rent a villa at Newport. The priest in charge, having accepted us on principle, prepares a lease written on a strip of tough white paper, three feet long by a few inches wide, and folded up like an accordion into a little book with blue cloth covers and a red label. The quaint Chinese characters stipulate that we respect local etiquette, that we do not enter the chapels for

purposes of amusement, — this stipulation is made since vandals danced on the Altar of Heaven, — that we cook our own coarse food in a special kitchen, as the priest is a vegetarian and does not like his pure diet defiled by the fumes of our 'cow meat,' and that our servants do not sing 'ribald songs' within hearing of the village girls. Otherwise we are free to do exactly as we please. In the 'Great Awakening,' though there is no license, there is perfect liberty — the genuine, tolerant liberty about which the world is always talking so much but does not have elsewhere.

The village near which our temple stands is, in fact, an island in the midst of the chaos that is the Western conception of modern China—an island of peace and innocence. Our neighbors are farmer folk, owning and working their own fields, most of whom have never been to the city, thirty miles away. They do not know what a motor-car looks like. They have no police, for crime is practically unknown among them. They have no post office, since none desires to send or receive letters.

Often I wonder why we, with all our boasted civilization, should be less tolerant than Orientals? For they are tolerant. They know we adhere to a 'strange' religion, but they neither mock at us nor try to convert us. Our priest, on the contrary, is so deter-

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *Japan Advertiser* (Tokyo American daily) of February 12 and 13 from *North China Daily News*

mined to make us feel comfortable about our difference of faith that the very day of our arrival he formulates a universal creed by which we — Christians and Buddhists — may live in harmony. God he translates as 'Heaven' or 'good.' Can we not all subscribe to that? Most certainly! Very well; then let us each follow the right as we see the right, with mutual respect. This being established, he further shows his broadmindedness by offering to put a memorial tablet on his altar to those of our friends who have given their lives in the Great War. What, I wonder again, would be the reception of Chinese Buddhists who came to summer in a New England town and to church services there?

Our priest is an educated man with an unusual odor of sanctity in a land where the clergy are generally, and deservedly, despised. He keeps his vows where his colleagues break theirs. He reads and studies. His eyes, as the people say, 'are awake'; therefore it is easier for him to understand us strangers. Not so the farmers who see white faces for the first time, and might be excused for thinking us devils. But curiosity helps to overcome their prejudices; while the arrival of our cart, with furniture and food, is an event that brings the whole population into the village street.

'*Ai yah*. These foreigners!' an old man exclaims. 'How much they need for the simple business of living!' Quite true. The Chinese can certainly teach us a lesson on how to be content with little. Even our priest, a cultivated gentleman, requires next to nothing for his comfort — two chairs, a table, a wadded quilt, a brass washbasin, a few books, and a single cupboard for his scanty wardrobe. No wonder, with such standards, that his guestrooms are sparsely furnished. We find a few stiff but elegant black-

wood chairs and graceful long tables in each room, and a brick platform for a bed — that is all. As guests of Buddha we learn again forgotten lessons of simplicity, for we have no electric bells, and are forced to remember that voices were made for calling. Our lights are candles, in tall red candlesticks, and having round white lanterns like full moons with lucky bats painted in red fitting over them. Water is hoisted from a well in a bamboo basket by a simple contrivance consisting of a wooden drum with a handle. A deaf old temple coolie turns this all day long for the munificent wage of two dollars a month — and turns it with a smile. What water escapes from our Chinese equivalent of the 'old oaken bucket' — and there is a great deal, because the basket is nearly as venerable as the coolie, and leaks badly — runs into a tiny irrigating trough to the kitchen garden and the miniature orchard beyond, where peach blossoms in May, and golden persimmons in October, make splashes of color against the gray temple walls.

A spring that gushes from the living rock and pours out of a stone dragon's mouth into a square basin, with a pretty parapet, serves us as a natural refrigerator. It is also the home of a living dragon. We have not seen him yet. But we are assured that a Manchu emperor who came here years ago was made to realize the monster's presence and his might.

Now, in former days, even sovereigns came to be guests of Buddha — came in state, traveling through the awed countryside in golden sedan chairs, with long processions of retainers carrying ceremonial umbrellas of yellow satin, and with camels having sable skins loaded with Imperial baggage hanging from their throats. So, once upon a time, the mighty Ch'ien Lung arrived to stand beside this pool at

the 'Great Awakening.' His Majesty looked into its limpid depths and commanded the Dragon to appear before him. A tiny creature swam to the surface with a bow. '*Aiyah*,' exclaimed the Son of Heaven in his pride, 'what an insignificant creature!' 'Hm,' said the Dragon under his breath, 'this mortal needs a lesson in humility!' Thereupon he lifted one scaly foot with fearsome claws above the water. It grew and grew till it cast a shadow on the sky. It grew and grew till it spread over the hills. It grew and kept on growing till it stretched beyond them to the Emperor's Summer Palace and made as if to clutch and crunch.

'Enough,' begged the sovereign; 'I do indeed believe you are a powerful dragon. Return, I beseech you, to your pool.' Whereupon His Majesty fell on his knees beside the spring, and knocked his head on the flagstone till the Dragon, appeased, reëntered the water.

We often and irreverently enter the cool water to bathe. But, so far, His Dragon Majesty has made no protest. Only the golden carp, which hasten to the rocks for shelter, resent our intrusion. We are careful, however, not to disturb them at meal times, when the priest's young assistant, an orphan boy, comes to the parapet and claps two pieces of wood sharply together. The fish hear this quaint dinner bell and gather to receive the bits of dough-cake thrown them.

On one day of the year the priest formally requests us not to swim. It is the day of the Harvest Festival, when a deputation of villagers comes to thank the Dragon for his gift of water. The little service they hold at the edge of the pool is very touching. All kneel together, all bow in unison, while prayers written upon yellow paper are burned and incense lighted. 'We thank thee, O Mighty Dragon,'

the farmers murmur, 'for the life-giving stream which escapes from this thy spring to fertilize our rice-fields.' Their service, though simple, is very reverent, and their gratitude very real. North China is a dry land. Not every village has the luck to have a Water Dragon.

For this same Harvest Festival there is a fair at the temple. Amusements are rare in the Chinese countryside, so great preparations are made for the holiday. The open space in front of the temple becomes overnight a hamlet of mat sheds for open-air restaurants, blacksmiths' shanties, and hair-cutting parlors, since the villagers still cling to the queue and like to have their heads newly dressed for the festival. Peddlers put up their stalls in the courtyards of the 'Great Awakening.' They make a brave show of colored cotton cloths for the women to wear and artificial flowers for them to put in their hair on such occasions as at weddings. Other vendors bring useful household articles like straw brooms, feather dusters, and wooden tubs. Then there are toys for the children, — ingenious trifles made of bamboo, clay, and feathers, costing less than a copper cent, — and sweetmeats of colored sugar that glow in the sunshine like rubies and emeralds.

After the worship in the sanctuary, where everyone burns incense to Buddha, the women indulge in an orgy of shopping, while the men take the opportunity to visit the blacksmith and have their farming implements repaired. Later all gather in front of the picturesque little open-air theatre that belongs to the temple, where a theatrical troupe performs for their amusement.

The players are only crude country mummers, but the audience is not fastidious, and enjoys the legendary and historical plays provided, however rudely acted. Imagination, held down

as a rule by the pressure of material life, runs riot to-day and supplies all deficiencies of scenery. When the buffoon comes on the bare stage with a whip in his hand everyone knows he is riding a spirited horse. His companion appears with a paddle. No need to tell the spectators that he is in a boat, crossing a raging river. And why further explain the taking of a city when a blue cloth screen painted like a fortress wall is brought out and a warrior points an arrow at it?

The priest, despite his superior culture, enjoys the play quite as much as his simple flock. As he sees a theatre only once a year, his critical faculty is mercifully dulled. We cannot help asking him whether he does not find eleven months of country life, with rare visits from intellectual equals and no amusements save this festival, monotonous. His philosophic answer is a gentle rebuke to our restless desire for perpetual thrills, to our frantic need for 'something doing,' forgotten as soon as it is done.

'Elder Brothers,' says he gently, 'is there not vast entertainment for the wise man in the rising of the sun beyond the hills, in the dripping of the stream, and in the song of those white pines that stand so straight in yonder courtyard like candlesticks to hold the stars?'

After the festival our living-quarters are invaded by the curious. On this one day none may be denied, and if we dislike the custom we have but to return to the city, since on this great occasion the temple belongs to the people. But because they are so polite, so truly courteous, we are content to let the women and children enter to marvel at our luxuries, at our tortoiseshell combs, — so much better than their scratchy wooden ones, — at our leather shoes that the rain cannot penetrate, at our soft rattan chairs in

which it is possible to lean back and relax, at our cups with handles and our sharp pronged forks — in a word, at all the wonders of our civilization.

'In your country,' ventures one old lady admiringly yet not enviously, 'you must have everything, everything that our poor homes lack.' We are tempted to reply, 'Yes, our people have everything that you have not — everything but contentment.'

Save on this one day of festival, our living-quarters are absolutely quiet. Only the soft-footed servants enter, and no sound penetrates but the song of the spring near which we are lodged. Hosts and guests, we each have a little house to ourselves. This is the Chinese way of building, in separate pavilions. It is a universal principle of their architecture, and applies equally to monasteries, palaces, and the dwellings of simple folk. Sometimes these pavilions stand around stone paved courtyards, sometimes they are scattered through a garden. At the 'Great Awakening' both methods are used. Our sitting-room, for instance, is in a formal court on flat ground; our bedrooms are dotted over the hillside above, each in a little yard of its own, with sheltering trees. Nowhere else in the world is there a system that gives the same sense of intimacy joined to the same sense of privacy. Its only drawback is great extravagance of ground-space.

Each pavilion is divided into two rooms by a carved wooden partition, or by a round blind window set in solid paneling. The smaller half serves as a bed-alcove, the larger as a private sitting-room. Both have paper windows protected by a wooden trellis. The paper is so pasted that sides and bottom are left loose, thus forming flaps which may be rolled up to admit air, and which are held in place by a spider-web of fine string. Incredible as

it seems to us, the tough paper keeps out the cold better than glass. The priest keeps his flowers in a paper hot-house all winter, and they thrive quite as well as in our elaborate conservatories.

Our doors also are papered, with a small wooden panel at the bottom for the sake of solidity. In this panel a hole is cut to let the cat in and out, and in winter pussy's door is covered with a wadded curtain which the intelligent creature learns to push aside. It is significant that there are no locks. None is needed; the entire temple compound is surrounded by a high brick wall, and the outer gate is closed at night and barred by a wooden bolt.

Two watchdogs, scraggy creatures rather like Alaskan huskies, with dispositions that are a curious mixture of fierceness and craven timidity, guard the monastery. But our real security is the inherent honesty of the peasants. Robbery among them is almost unknown. We leave everything open, and our rings on the long carved table that serves as a bureau. Nothing is ever disturbed except by our own red setter pup, who occasionally swallows a table napkin or gnaws a book, or by the high winds that sweep over the plain and scatter our papers. When the latter come rushing down from the distant Mongolian desert we close our doors and barricade them with two little stone lions that stand on our narrow verandah. They are quaint creatures, little decorative freaks, chips of the imagination of some forgotten artist with a droll sense of humor. One is fat with a stolid face and an absurd curly tail; the other is thin with a cunning smile. We have named them after two members of our Diplomatic Corps. Everybody sees the resemblance, even the gentlemen in question, and they are generally known in our Peking 'toy community' as the 'joke lions.'

Now stone lions are common decorations in the courts of Buddha. Two huge ones keep guard over the main sanctuaries of the 'Great Awakening.' It is easy to see that they were carved by a sculptor who never saw a real 'King of Beasts' but made up a model out of his head. Nevertheless he has contrived to fashion quite a convincing pair of monsters, with stone curls on their pates like King Charles's periwigs. The male has a ball under one paw, and into this toy the milk which Chinese lions are supposed to secrete in their claws is said to be flowing. When real lions roamed these hills hundreds of years ago, according to tradition, the people say that their forefathers went in search of such balls at dawn, extracted the lion's milk, and cured diseases with it. The lioness is shown with a cub under her paw sucking its nourishment from her claws.

Just beyond the guardian lions is Buddha's main shrine, in a line with the imposing entrance-gate, which is painted a soft reddish pink — pink with the gray of ashes in it. The temple has a graceful upturned roof covered with yellow tiles. The priest explains that these tiles were the gift of an emperor. They are not to be found everywhere, but were always a special mark of favor from a sovereign who desired to honor the gods, or else a sign that the sanctuary beneath them was Imperial property. The 'Great Awakening' happens to be a memorial temple to a prince of the Manchu Dynasty. His tablet rests in a special tablet house that corresponds to what we should call a mortuary chapel. After we have won his confidence, ever a slow business in China, the priest allows us to enter. Our first impression is emptiness. Then, as our eyes grow accustomed to the semidarkness, we distinguish the tablet — a simple strip of lacquered wood standing on a dusty altar, with



an incense-burner, two vases of gilded lotus flowers, and two candlesticks in front of it. Above are yellow silken draperies three hundred years old, falling into tatters. The whole room is in the casual disorder characteristic of Chinese holy places. We distinguish a shadowy heap of painted glass lanterns, sixteenth century, that would delight the heart of a curio-collecting globe-trotter. They are used only at the yearly festival. Leaning against a wall are rusty iron pikes with moth-eaten red horsehair tassels, which denote the dwelling of a warrior, which every Manchu prince theoretically was.

A pile of broken chairs and tables stands in one corner, with a bunch of old feather dusters and the priest's broad-brimmed summer hat. Alongside is the coffin which every self-respecting man in China buys early in life and keeps ready, giving it an extra coat of lacquer each year. What strikes us forcibly in this dusty sanctuary is the curious Chinese familiarity with the dead. This table represents in the eyes of the priest an actual person, a clan superior, a living soul. Any irreverence toward it is unthinkable. Yet there is nothing unseemly in Chinese eyes in storing personal belongings in the sanctuary, any more than there would be in asking a friend for permission to put some of your things in his cupboard because you had not enough room in yours. Few foreigners ever fathom the attitude of these Orientals toward their dear departed. Some of us believe it to be superstitious worship, and are shocked. But in truth it is really a continued loving association that persists beyond the grave. Those who have gone across the 'Celestial River,' according to their belief, still need those who remain on earth, and vice versa. From the Shadowy World the spirits retain an interest in their living kinsfolk and

their retainers, listen to their joys and griefs, and once a year return to partake of the feast prepared for them. The fumes of wine poured out in thimble cups, the vapors of the meats set out on the offering table, give them sustenance. Without these loving sacrifices made at regular intervals the souls would be hungry and lonely. And that is why the Chinese so desire the gift of sons that there may be a male descendant to care for the souls of the ancestors. Though women may share in the cult, they cannot maintain it.

We are permitted as a great favor to watch the service that the little Prince, a boy of eight years, last descendant of an illustrious line, holds every autumn in honor of his forefather. He comes at the beginning of the cold season, bringing with him food and bundles of winter clothes — that is to say, paper models of wadded garments, which are burned in the huge iron brazier near the shrine. The underlying idea is that the clothing ascends in smoke to the 'Beyond' to keep the 'Ancestor' warm. We suggest that the founder of the family must have been a very good man to deserve so much attention. 'Good or bad,' replies the priest, 'it is not for his descendants to judge. These sacrifices are the custom, and not to make them would be disgraceful. It so happens that the First Prince was indeed a good man. In his lifetime people called him the "Harmonious One," though his official title was Prince Yi. Best beloved of the eighteen turbulent brothers of the Emperor Yung-chêng whom foreigners remember because of the beautiful monochrome porcelains made during his reign, Prince Yi also knew how to endear himself to the peasants of this neighborhood, most of whom were tenants of his lands. As a tribute to his charity and wise administration, they gave, at his death in

1730, from their precious grainfields, land to build this temple. One of those two stone tablets standing yonder on the terrace records the contribution of the Emperor Yung-chêng himself in lumps of silver for these buildings. The other is a list of village families who gave a few coppers each out of their meagre savings for the same noble purpose.'

Then the priest, who, like all Chinese, has a keen sense of humor, added with a twinkle in his eye, 'You foreigners must have heard of Prince Yi. He was the man who, when certain missionaries suspected of stirring up factions among the too-numerous Imperial Clansmen came to him to intercede for them with his brother the Emperor, replied: "What would you say if we were to transport ourselves to the Western world and act as you have done here? Would you permit it for a moment? In the course of time I shall master this business, but I declare to you that China will want for nothing when you cease to live in it, nor will your absence cause it any loss. Here nobody is retained by force; but nobody will be permitted to remain who breaks our laws or ignores our customs.'" We smile in reply as at a huge joke, and wonder if our servants have been bringing out newspapers from town and lending them to the priests. Only yesterday there were editorials echoing Prince Yi's remarks.

Meanwhile the tablet house is ceremoniously closed up again, and we spend the rest of the day full of thought about the new China and the old under the trees. Some very wise gardener, worthy to collaborate with the architect who gave the splendid sweep to the roofs of the 'Great Awakening' and planned the elegant proportions of its courtyards, did the planting here. First he must have set out the magnificent white pines with their ghostly

trunks and branches that stand alone in two separate little gardens on either side of the tablet house. It takes the pines of North China fifty years to put on their white shrouds, and only after a century of growth do they attain their full splendor. The dark-skinned umbrella pines spread their green arms over the roof of Buddha's sanctuary in the course of a man's lifetime. Like green æolian harps they play in every breeze, answering with soft, low notes the tinkling wind-bells hanging from the eaves.

The flowering crab apple that in spring sends a soft snowfall of white petals on to the terrace is older than our grandmothers. The trumpet vine whose scarlet blossoms glow against the wall has flowered a hundred times in honor of the 'Harmonious Prince.' For more than two centuries the splendid ginkgo in our living-courtyard — this strange tree species, oldest of its race and known to botanists as the last link with the fern family — has shed its leaves in autumn, dropping them like golden coins on to the pavement. But it seems to me as if the gardener loved the catalpa best, for he planted it beside the pool; a precious tree, since the wood of its species was always chosen for Imperial coffins; a friendly tree too, lending its trunk and branches to the climbing wisteria vines and sociably dropping its sweet-scented pink blossoms with the purple tassels of its guest into the water of the spring.

Perhaps it is because the trees in China have been so long and lovingly tended by the hand of man that they seem to become almost human, and sometimes half-divine. We have seen incense burned before a ginkgo in a neighboring temple and solemn worship paid to it. We are assured that certain trees have souls. Why not? In China so many things have souls — tablets, crumbling images, the little

grave-mounds that dot the fields, and many a stream and spring. As for men and women, they each have not one but three souls — a soul for temporal and temporary use, a soul to hover round the tomb, and a soul to rest in the tablet.

As we sit at the sunset hour in the courtyard under the big open pavilion with red lacquer pillars and beetling eaves, as we listen to the soft chiming of the wind-bells and watch the young acolyte going his evening rounds with lighted incense-sticks for Buddha, the Tablet, and the Dragon God, we hear a strange unearthly cry from the village, and on inquiry learn that someone is 'calling a soul.'

It seems there is a child who is very sick — unconscious, in fact. The priest explains that the little soul has left the body, and that the family must try to get it back or the boy will surely die. Hence the weird, unearthly cry, reserved for such occasions. The voice is a woman's voice, and a mother's. It is heart-rending. Suddenly there is silence, followed by a burst of weeping. What has happened now, we ask? The soul would not return, they tell us. The child is dead. Filled with pity, we inquire if there is anything we can do to help the stricken family. 'Your charitable intention does you credit, Elder Brothers,' says the priest with that unconscious air of pleasurable surprise that an educated Chinese assumes, quite unintentionally, whenever he finds that the rude Barbarian Foreigner shows a sense of real propriety. 'The family is indeed very miserable. Undoubtedly a little contribution for the funeral would be welcome'.

Our minds fly to wreaths of white paper chrysanthemums or the satin scrolls with gilded ideographs that the Chinese send on such occasions, and we are puzzling how to get them out from town in time. Somehow the priest

divines our thoughts. 'The dead person being of young age, the funeral will take place very soon. I shall be asked to consult my almanac and choose the first lucky day. There must be one within a week or two. Of course, in the case of an adult decency would require a longer interval, perhaps of several months. But a child, having no descendants, needs no elaborate ceremonies. Still, if the Elder Brothers graciously desire to help, a contribution of a silver dollar would be generous.' We decide to send two silver dollars that the poor little soul may have a fine funeral and the mother's heart be soothed. 'Your munificence will be remembered forever in the village,' comments the priest as he instructs us how to wrap our tiny gift in white paper and when to send it to make the most effect.

The gift of the foreigners must arrive when the neighbors are assembled in the house of mourning. Thus will great 'face' be given to the poor little weeping mother and her social position be vastly increased. May this consolation, so dear to the heart of woman, help to dry her tears. In the servants' quarters we overhear a discussion. 'Now why,' says our Number One Boy who acts as butler, 'should these foreigners care if a stranger peasant woman weeps?'

'I'll answer you that when you tell me why the Barbarians leave their comfortable houses in the city and come to this humble village to live among simple folk who dig and sow and live in mud huts among the hills,' answers the coolie chambermaid. 'Their ways are inscrutable to us because they are mad,' says the priest. 'Nevertheless it is well that they give money to the distressed. Money at the right time helps to calm even a mother's grief. Besides,' he adds philosophically, 'time will cure all things save perversity in asses.'



# THE PROVINCE OF THE REVIEWER<sup>1</sup>

BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

How easy is it to compose the title-page of an authoritative treatise, like Locke's or John Austin's, and how hard to contribute a line toward the elucidation of the theme.

Many long years ago I read, in one of those Preliminary Dissertations that in the earlier part of the last century still often formed the impressive, if not inviting, portico to substantial and many-volumed works, that 'the origin of reviewing has been attributed to Photius.' This was quite enough in those days to induce me to stop my reading and go in search of this fertile Photius from whose entrails sprang the buzzing swarm of reviewers. At first I got started on a false scent, and found myself reading about a Photius who was the son by a former alliance of that very wicked woman, Theodora, — in whose career, needless to say, Gibbon took such an unholy interest, — and consequently was the stepson of the Emperor Justinian, whose Institutes have played no inconsiderable part in the education of many of us. This Photius was, as I soon discovered, not my man. The true Photius, the *fons et origo mali*, belonged to the ninth century, and his life, even in an epitome, presented most varied features, for he was not only an ambassador, a judge, and a soldier, but also an ecclesiastic, who in less than a week contrived to become monk, subdeacon, deacon, and presbyter, ending up on Christmas Day 858 as Patriarch

of Constantinople! Would we could hold out to the young reviewers of the *Observer* any prospect of so rapid a preferment in either Church or State!

The claims of Photius to be the real father of our profession will not bear examination, for, though a great book-collector, — which few reviewers are, — and a persistent reader and note-taker, his *Myriobiblion* or *Bibliotheca* is reported to me to contain nothing but selected passages from the books he had read — like another and an earlier Macaulay in India — during one embassy to Persia, and was never intended to be a critical survey. Still, the fact that Photius first *read* the manuscripts he noticed entitles him to a place of honor in our ranks.

This Photian method of reviewing endured for many centuries, and probably gave satisfaction to the authors, who, as they had no copyright in their labors, could hardly complain of being abridged.

The true parent of the reviewer, as he exists among us to-day, is to be found, where we might expect to find him, in France, but no further back than the middle of the seventeenth century — when Denis de Sallo, a man of position and mark, established in 1655 the *Journal des Savants*, or *Sçavans*, as the word was then printed. This was a weekly publication, and contained reviews 'of the most popular and distinguished publications in every department of literature.' The style of this periodical soon became so lively and sarcastic that de Sallo, wishing to

<sup>1</sup> From the *Observer* (London Moderate Sunday paper), March 14