

“THE SINGULARITY OF BUDDHISM.”

A “slight attempt to explain this venerable and noble creed” is the prefatory description of Mr. J. Wettha Sinha’s new work on Buddhism which contains an introduction and notes by Mr. F. L. Woodward, M. A. The reader, on closing the book after perusal, will certainly come to the conclusion that the title of this work has been singularly well chosen, for the treatment of his subject by the author is eminently singular and cannot fail to strike the reader as such. It is not a treatise on Buddhism, nor even an essay, for practically, no attempt is made to explain its doctrines ; there is no reasoning out of the points brought forward and no logical sequence in their presentment ; it is not a book in the sense the word is understood in the West. It is a mere jumbling together of 221 propositions, embodying the theories of the Tipitaka and the Singhalese commentaries without any apparent order, but with the avowed and laudable purpose to bring into relief the singularity of Buddhism among all the other religions of the world, and of bringing forward its claims to this unique distinction. Another characteristic which strikes the reader is that the work appears to have been composed in a *furor scribendi* which carries the author hurry-scurry through his string of propositions as if the safety of Buddhism depended solely on their being written and read as quickly as possible. For instance, the following lines take us in seven-league boots to the beginning of the 221 theories: “Coming to post-Vedic literature, we find that the second portion of the Veda known as Brahmana contains ritualistic precepts and illustrations ; and the third division of the Veda is called Upanishad, or the mystical doctrine, and in the Isa and Chandogya Upanishads the pantheistic doctrine of Brahmanism is given. In short, Hinduism is ritualistic and sacrificial, and it is monotheistic, tri-theistic, polytheistic, animistic and eternalistic ; and nomistic and philosophical Brahmanism is pantheistic, animistic and eternalistic. Hence,

any attempt to reconcile Hinduism with non-ritualistic, atheistic, positivist, semi-materialist and stoical Buddhism is as futile as trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers." The cucumbers are delightful and refreshing after this hasty run through all those "*istic*" epithets.

Let us say, however, that the only things blamable in the work of Mr. Wettha Sinha are this very haste and his unaccountable lack of method. No one, after reading the book, will doubt that he is a good scholar and well read in Pāli; and the impression of his scholarship is borne out when he tells us he is a pupil of the venerable and world-renowned Sri Sumangala; but the methods of his venerable master are more critical than those of his pupil. Mr. Sinha will, if he re-writes his book composedly and according to critical canons, produce a work which will be not a little appreciated. Mr. F. L. Woodward, no doubt, perceived the infantine method of exposition and the crude, though learned, dogmatism of Mr. Sinha, and his preface is an attempt to assuage the effect the book must necessarily produce. He is much less happy in his notes at the end of the book; they savour too much of American Neo-Buddhism, although they will no doubt appeal very much to readers who like the display of spiritualism and theosophical terms, such as the "pranic stream," the "similarly-vibrating skandhas," the "phantom-self-reflection of reflection," the "aura," and who may like to know that "dark-red issues from the base of the brain; yellow from the upper brain; green from the phrenological organ of benevolence."

"R. G."

C. D.