

A REPLY TO MR. BLAUSS.

Object of the Brooklyn Ethical Association—Denials Made by C. M. Higgins to "Dropping into Buddhism."

To the Editor of The New York Times:

I have read the slashing letter of your correspondent, John Lincoln Blauss, on "Dropping into Buddhism" in your issue of May 24, and wish to submit the following in reply.

Mr. Blauss seems to imagine so "many vain things" and "knows so many things that are not so," particularly about the Brooklyn Ethical Association, its Oriental friends, &c., that I will now endeavor to set him right as to his facts, which he has got rather twisted, in assuming his heroic attitude of Christian champion against "the moral black plague of India"—whatever that may mean.

Now, first: Does it not strike Mr. B. as a little silly to conclude that because a Hindu or a Buddhist lectures before a certain society and that society treats him in a gentlemanly, respectful, and sympathetic way, that this proves that the members of that society are consequently Buddhist or Hindu devotees or converts? Does the listening to the exposition of a man's doctrine and the fact of being an interested and respectful observer of his ceremonial or ritual constitute a logical and necessary equivalent of an absolute or even quasi-acceptance of his system? A Democrat who attends a Republican meeting to hear its arguments, study its platform, and see and admire its great men, therefore becomes a Republican in fact! A Protestant who enters a Catholic church to observe its ritual, learn its doctrine, and enjoy the charm and pomp of its service becomes, of course, a devout Catholic. This seems to be about the logic of the Blauss letter.

Now, "The Brooklyn Ethical Association" is simply an educational society, not in any way partisan or sectarian, and not committed to any creed or dogma. Its main purpose, as stated in its Constitution, is simply the scientific study of ethics, politics, religion, biology, &c. Its purpose is not the blind acceptance of anything on faith, or the mere word of any one, no matter how ancient or how modern. Its work is the free, untrammelled study of all the subjects mentioned from the rational standpoint and by the scientific method. Now this attitude and purpose may strike Mr. Blauss as something quite reprehensible, and as being so "cocksure" and "infallible" as he calls it, but nevertheless a few of us in Brooklyn and elsewhere are firmly convinced that it is quite a sensible, manly, and good thing, and we shall continue to act right along that line, notwithstanding the lack of Mr. B.'s approval.

In the pursuit of the objects stated our society has secured authorized representatives from abroad or profound students at home of each great religion or philosophy to address us from time to time. Thus, in the last season of 1896 and 1897 the society has given a most unique, valuable, and instructive course of lectures on the "Evolution of Ethics," which has included the following subjects by experts, both native and foreign:

"Ethics of the Hindus," "Ethics of Zoroaster and the Parsis," "Buddhism," "The Chinese Sages," "The Greek Philosophers," "The Hebrews," "The Mohammedans," "Ethics of the New Testament," "The German Schools," "Utilitarian Ethics," and, finally, "Ethics of Evolution."

Now, let us ask the accurate Mr. Blauss, who has accused us of being so "cocksure" and "infallible" about everything, why it is that when he charged us with becoming Buddhist or Hindu converts and devotees, because we have listened to and studied under representatives of those creeds, he did not also accuse us of becoming Parsees, Stoics, Epicureans, Taoists, Jews, Mohammedans, and also devotees of Confucius? I suppose Mr. Blauss's idea is that each time we hear a lecture we become a convert and devotee of that system. Hence, Mr. Editor, you will see on looking over the list given that, according to Mr. Blauss's logic, we should be called the great religious chameleon of the age.

No wonder this work disturbs Mr. Blauss and men like him, who would evidently never have found any fault with us if we had studied Christianity only, and not given any thought to the other great religions and philosophies of the world which have done so much for humanity, and even for Christianity itself.

Talking about Hindu and Buddhist, Mr. Blauss does not seem to know the difference between them. He calls our friend Swami Vivekananda a Buddhist priest! Now, he is neither a Buddhist nor a priest. He is a Hindu monk, and is a teacher of the Hindu, Vedantic, or Brahman religions. I do not intend, Mr. Editor, to make of your columns a primer of comparative religion for Mr. Blauss's special benefit, but by looking up the subject he may learn the difference before he makes the next onslaught on the "moral black plagues of Asia." On this point he can get a good deal of help from our last course of lectures, as soon as they are in print. I will say here, however, for the sake of the gayety of the occasion that to confound the two systems as Mr. Blauss has done would be just about as if one should assume that a Jew was necessarily a Christian, which will, of course, make "our smiling friend," the Swami, smile the more. Now, with as much ignorance and bad taste, he has seen fit to call the Swami "a philosophical quack," but he needs no defense on that charge to any one who knows him, and particularly not from the hands of a man who does not know him any better than to call him a Buddhist priest. He has lectured before Yale and Harvard students, and we think he is regarded as anything but an Oriental, philosophical quack by the Faculties of those colleges.

The next man who arouses your correspondent's ire and has drawn out his letter of inaccuracies is H. Dharmapala, a Buddhist monk from Ceylon. Dharmapala gave two addresses on Buddhism before our association, has given several lectures in Chicago, Boston, New York, and elsewhere, and was so well pleased with the hospitable and "Christian" style with which he had been received so far in this country that, happening to be in Brooklyn at the time of a great festival in his religion, he invited the members of our society and many others to attend his celebration of the Buddha's birthday, on the full moon night in the month of May, which celebration he gave with the Buddhist ceremonies as near as he could with the facilities afforded by his Brooklyn friends. Even that grand old Christian, Father Malone of Brooklyn, was so far corrupted by us that on request of a prominent member he actually loaned his censer for the occasion. We suppose, therefore, that Father Malone, too, is now a fully-fledged Buddhist, like the rest of us, and has thus put himself in the pot—or, we should rather say, in the censer—with the rest of the crowd.

If, however, it will help the good Christian Blauss to ease up on the gravity of our offense, we will say that in this little affair of the Buddha's birthday the Brooklyn Ethical Association was simply the guest and not the host of our Buddhist brother.

The artistically printed invitations which each guest received from Dharmapala contained in the lower left-hand corner the pre-Buddhistic and post-Buddhistic legend, "Refreshments." This mystical legend we think we have sometimes seen on Christian cards, and, being interpreted, will explain the "blessed lemonade and crackers" which Mr. Blauss raves over.

I think, Mr. Editor, that we will all begin to see about this time that our friend Blauss has certainly contributed to the gayety of nations, in taking himself so seriously and misunderstandingly in this whole matter.

At this point I wish to say, although it may shock Mr. Blauss, that, individually, I much regretted the non-arrival of the ancient statue of Buddha, for I was anxious to see what this debasing and horrible idol was, which I had been early taught that these heathens worshipped, and I was anxious to see, if I could, why it was so vile for the Buddhists to use their statue of Buddha exactly as the Christians use a statue of a saint, which latter is not considered vile at all. Perhaps Mr. B. can tell us.

Now, seriously, Mr. Editor, there has been so much misunderstanding and misrepresentation about the work and motives of these Orientals in America and of the people who are friendly to them here, that it is high time that all persons like Mr. Blauss get down at once from their rollicking hobby-horse of ignorance and bigotry and stand on the broad ground of "sweet reasonableness," intelligent liberality, and a common humanity, and try to understand and respect the mental attitudes and motives of all these people. Let us try to learn what these Orientals can teach us of their own creeds and races, so much misunderstood and misrepresented by Christians, and try to have a little broad human sympathy for all creeds and peoples—at least try to know them intelligently before we talk against them. We make a great fuss about sending our missionaries to these races and getting a hearing from them, but some of us seem to make a terrible objection if any of these Orientals try to talk to us and ex-

plain to us their creeds. Is this just or consistent or worthy of our pretensions of freedom and superiority? Christianity, with all its efforts in the past, has practically made no impression on these old creeds and races. Is it not worth our while to try to find out the reason why?

Now it is a general ignorance, prejudice, and misrepresentation against the old creeds and races such as Mr. Blauss shows, that the Brooklyn Ethical Association, and kindred associations and individuals who have been harboring and encouraging our Oriental brothers, would like to see removed and a better and truer understanding of our fellow-men in all parts of the world brought about. And it is thought that there is no better way to do this than to have the true blue—or, I should rather say, the true yellow—natives from those distant lands come to us and tell us from their own lips and eyes what their creeds are, and let us see what manner of men they are themselves in fraternal converse. We want them also to bring their so-called "idols" and ceremonies with them as much as they please, so that we can get really acquainted with them also. Men like Mr. Blauss may not agree with us in this opinion, but I regard it as a great favor and a great education to the American people for these men to come among us and instruct us in this way, and I shall certainly continue to help and encourage them in this good work wherever I can. What I ask for them, therefore, is only a fair, respectful, and cordial hearing, and not a merely condescendingly patronizing attention which a man like Mr. Blauss might be reluctantly induced to give them.

As to the "blast of withering common sense" which Mr. Blauss refers to, perhaps he can explain how he would apply that blast to the work of the Brooklyn Ethical Association. And do we understand that he would apply this so-called withering process to the miracles and doctrines of Christianity as freely as he would to the miracles and doctrines of Buddhism? And are we also to understand him to say that Christians never listen to, or "regard with awe what they do not understand," but that only members of our society and Buddhists do this? These few trifles require explanation.

It may be proper to here call Mr. Blauss's attention to the fact that the majority of our members are, or confess to be, Christians of all stripes, from Roman to Unitarian, and I am happy to say that we have also some Jews among us, as well as some rationalists, agnostics, &c., and I will now ask Mr. Blauss to explain himself about a little charge he makes against the Brooklyn Ethical Association and its individual members. He says: "They repudiate the most vigorous moral teaching which ever swayed the consciousness of men and accepted with solemn satisfaction the flabbiest, most inconsequential and emasculating dogma which ever blighted the destiny of a great people." Now I would like to know what he is here talking about. Will Mr. Blauss please define what is the specific vigorous moral teaching that we repudiate, either as a society or as individuals? I was not aware that we repudiated any vigorous moral teaching, no matter whether it originated with Jew or Christian, Buddhist, stoic, or Confucian. I would also like to have Mr. Blauss clearly define the flabby, emasculating dogma, &c., which, according to Mr. Blauss, we have now adopted.

In this whole matter I wish to finally add that I speak as an individual member, and not in any official capacity, but I think I voice our general sentiment.

CHARLES M. HIGGINS.

Brooklyn, N. Y., May 27, 1897.