



ATHLETIC CHRISTIANITY MEETS ATHLETIC BUDDHISM.

Buddhist priests and Christians whose baseball game marks a new phase of religious rivalry in the East. The Buddhist priests wear white caps; the Abbot (No. 1) sits behind Mr. Hall (No. 2), the leader of the Christian team.

“Christians 2, Buddhists 1”

THAT WAS THE FINAL SCORE of a baseball game played not long ago between Christian Bible-class teachers and students on the one hand, and Buddhist priests on the other, in the grounds of the great Higashi Hongwanji Buddhist temple at Kyoto, Japan. Tho it was a good ball-game, its place in the annals of sport is less important than its religious significance. Christian missionaries in Japan are extremely interested in the present revival of Buddhism in that country. The Buddhists are waking up. They are no longer simply resisting the spread of Christianity; they have entered upon a campaign of active competition in the new faith. They are going out to fight modern Christianity with its own weapons. They have adopted and adapted to their own use such means of reaching people as the sermon, the Sunday-school, and the weekly prayer-meeting. To retain their influence on the young people to whom Y. M. C. A. and mission school activities are so attractive, they have even taken up the popular forms of modern athletics. And so it happened that one day Mr. M. E. Hall, an American Board missionary in Kyoto, was surprised by a message from the Chief Abbot or High Priest of the Higashi Hongwanji temple to the effect that the young Buddhist priests of his temple would like to play a match game of baseball against the students and teachers of the mission school. Great was the excitement, says Mr. Hall, as the challenge was read and accepted and preparations made for the match. “Christians playing ball with Buddhist priests led by the High Priest himself!” Moreover, the Abbot himself is of royal blood. When the great day came there was the athletic Abbot practising at short-stop on the diamond in the temple grounds. And, as Mr. Hall continues the story in *The Japan Mission News* (Zushi):

“The Abbot had a fine-looking lot of young priests with him too, finely educated men, one or two of them being from the University; nice fellows to talk to, and alive to the task set before them of arousing Buddhism in this land. They know well that the old-time priest is good for just what he is now used—burying people, but that for the task of keeping people alive he is a discard. Knowing this, the activities of the Christians are taken as a model, with the result that there are a great number of Buddhist Sunday-schools throughout the country, Buddhist ‘Bible’ classes meeting regularly at the temples, sermons preached on Sunday, and I have seen even the weekly prayer-meeting! Athletics keep the young men together as in any land, and at last the fever had invaded the sacred precinct itself and we had been invited to play these priests at their own grounds. The only difference I noticed between the priests and the young men that we took to the game was that the priests had closely shaved heads. I am not sure that there were not some men among that bunch of priests that knew about all there was to be taught in baseball. At least, if we thought we were to run over them we were to have a surprise. And what a setting for a game it was—pilgrims had swarmed into the grounds to see the strange sight of a ball-game in the temple grounds, temple bells, and the mumblings of prayers, and the temples themselves surrounding us—it was complete. For eight long innings we battled before either side scored, and it was the priests then who put a run across! I thought Christianity was to be put to shame, and when we failed in the same inning I knew we were doomed. Harada, son of the former Doshisha President, drove to center; Shively, Doshisha professor, lined to right. Then the last man you would have expected to be so generous came to our assistance. With these two men on second and third a ball was rapped to the High Priest, who, despite his royal connections, let it roll between his feet: two men crossed the plate, and the game was won. Christians 2, Buddhists 1.”