

BUDDHA AND HIS DOCTRINE.

THE early Christian missionaries who had been sent to India, China and Thibet were surprised to find, side by side with gross idolatry, a religious culture only possible among a people of considerable intellectual advancement. The reports and letters of these men are filled with enthusiastic accounts of a belief which they found there, and which was so strikingly like Christianity that they expressed in a confident manner the hope that the marvellous concurrence of Indic faith with the Christian doctrine would make the task of conversion an easy one. Strange were these accounts indeed. They tell of the use of holy water and the rosary, choirs, sacred images, tonsure, vestments, the bell in religious service, the orders of nuns and monks, and the vows of the monastic system. In the Lamaism of China and Thibet, which is an outgrowth of Buddhism, they even found, or thought to find, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the reverence to Virgin and Child, confessions, fasts, purgatory, abbots, cardinals, and even a tiara-crowned pope. The Christian world stood amazed. Travellers who had become more intimate with the creeds of the Chinese and Indians brought with them fragments of the Sacred Scriptures of these people which would not have been incongruous side by side with the tenets of the New Testament. Quasi-scientific treatises became plentiful. A motley patchwork of fragments, not even obtained from original texts—for these were still hidden from the Western World—were edited as true expositions of these creeds, and a host of writers sprang up who advanced theories, plausible enough, had they not been impressions derived from such an incomplete and inadequate source. Many there were who insisted that the analogy between Christianity and the eastern creeds, Buddhism more especially, was a conclusive proof that these were the sources of the former. For instance, much stress has been laid upon the assumption that the *Logos* doctrine was imported from India. It would indeed have been of great historical importance could this have been proven, but the history of the doctrine reveals nothing. We only know that *Vac*, speech or word, among the Indians, was, in the first instance, a goddess of the Vedic theogeny, which, at some later time, idealized by the Brahmins, was made an idea of primary importance in Brahminic mysticism. We find it used later by Heraclitus and the Stoics, in Philo and the Neo-Platonists, and

finally in the doctrine of St. John. However this doctrine may have crept into Greek systems, the assertion that the Logos of the Evangelist was derived from the Brahminic books is one more easily made than proven.

Speculations like this might have been passed as idle and harmless had not error kept pace with the truth. As Buddhism became known, it began to fill a peculiar purpose in the reasonings of Atheists and Agnostics. The tendency of this century has been to eliminate God, to deny the immortality of the soul, to subvert religion, and to build the social structure upon a basis of human reason. There was one obstacle which the non-believer could not overcome, namely, the impracticability of destroying, together with religion, morality itself; for he well knew that there must at least be a moral constraint upon the social body. Without religion, that is, without the belief in a God and a future state, how would it be possible to maintain morality? Theoretically, the possibility had been demonstrated. Had not Voltaire, almost a century ago, established a purely atheistic basis for morality, and was not Spencer's system of ethics an admirable theory? Yet the world needed an example before it could accept a moral code without a God and a future life as a safe basis. Atheism and Agnosticism are the scientific premises which have communism and even anarchy as necessary conclusions; and all the theorization of infidel thinkers had not convinced the masses that these would not be dangerous experiments. Behold, in the East, a practical demonstration of the feasibility of such a condition of things! Here was a religion Atheistic or Agnostic, and even Nihilistic, and behold, its moral code is excellent, its tenets have been promulgated over more than half the world. Are there not five hundred million Buddhists? The wild hordes on the table-lands of Nepal Tartary and Thibet, the vast population of China and of the peninsula of Korea, the Japanese, the Siamese, the Singalese, and even the inhabitants of the Javanese Archipelago, have followed the doctrine of Buddha. Has not this apostle, who well may be called the "Light of Asia," implanted in all these millions the spirit of benevolence, righteousness, and social order? The Buddhist cult is remarkably like the Christian faith, even in its outward signs. The moral law which Buddha has taught is older than the law of Christ, and so like it in its conception, as well as its results, that the conclusion has been arrived at that Christianity has been borrowed from the East. "Is it not evident," cries out Schopenhauer, "that long before the days of the Nazarene—even before Alexander stood on the banks of the Indus—the monk Gotama had gathered eternal truths from Scriptures more ancient than the Hebrew Songs and Chronicles? Christianity is a pla-

organisms has survived. All that remains worthy of attention are the sacred books. Buddhism has shared the same fate where it has not been crushed out by Hinduism. It has become base idolatry. It is the image of Buddha which is adored ; the power of the teacher has passed away.

This is the religion pure, perhaps, in its source, but prostituted in centuries of application to abominable uses, which modern atheists declare to be a fitting substitute for Christianity. If men like Rhys Davids, whose self-sacrificing labor the world truly appreciates, have found in Buddhism the religion which comes nearest our own, we must ascribe it, not to the modern phases of that faith, but to the idealized conception of the same as it exists in the Sacred Canons alone. The fact that there are resemblances between the law of Christ and the law of Buddha does not logically lead to the conclusion that the one is kindred to the other. Schopenhauer is no authority upon the subject. It is doubtful if he ever translated one line of the Pali-books or of the Sanskrit Scriptures. Even Rhys Davids, whose admiration for Buddhism has led him to over-estimate its influence or power, warns us against apparent resemblances between passages in the Pali-Pitakas and in the New Testament. That like passages do exist he does not deny ; but he emphatically adds that it is a palpable error to deduce from this coincidence an historic connection, or to conclude that the New Testament, as the more recent Scriptures, has borrowed from the Pali-books. Where such resemblances exist,—and often they are least when at first reading they seem greatest,—it is principally due to an analogy in the circumstances which gave rise to two similar movements. The seeming resemblance of Buddha and his doctrine to Christ and his teaching has, nevertheless, furnished the opponents of Christianity with a weapon of attack. The manner of connection between the two, or of the possible derivation of the one from the other, does not concern those who wish to see in such resemblances a weapon against Christianity. For them, the fact that both have much in common is a sufficient basis for a refutation of the whole scheme of the Christian faith. They argue, *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* ; cleverly disguising the fact that the Eastern Scriptures constitute a field of knowledge comparatively unknown, and that it is even now impossible to establish their historic position or significance.

The reader must bear in mind that up to the year 1870 only two Pali-texts (which alone can be relied upon as authentic) of any size or importance had appeared in editions accessible to scholars in the West, and that, of these two, only one was a book out of the Buddhist Scriptures. Since then the research has been going on, and many of the books have been translated and annotated.

ment of intent and without permanent change of direction, from an objective polytheism to an abstruse mysticism, sustained only by Brahminic ritualism into which the idea of God was no longer admitted. If the idea of divinity entered into this religion at all, it was divested of all attributes of supremacy, and the gods were regarded as an order of beings different from the creatures of the visible world, but having no manner of ascendancy or control over them.

Time was when the religion of the Indian was a chaotic adoration of natural phenomena as living powers—when Indra, the god who wields the storm and the lightning, the mightiest of the gods, filling the universe, the heavens resting upon his head, earth and heaven trembling at his breath; when Surya Savitar (Sol, *ἡλιος*), shining in the heavens, life-giving and life-destroying; when Varuna (*υπερνος*), the god of a thousand eyes, the sin-forgiving god, who causes heaven and earth to stand firm and the stars to retain their places—when these were realities to him which he feared and adored, and with which he held direct communion by intercession and propitiatory sacrifices. The early Vedic hymns breathe the same spirit as the battle-song of the Teuton. Indra is Thor, Savitar is Wodan. With the centuries, however, the Indian has learned to regard the natural and supernatural in this world from a different point of view, and imperceptibly a change is instilled into this theogeny. In the Brahmanas, written centuries after the Rig Veda, man subdues the gods, until finally, in the Upanishads, man ignores them and becomes himself like God. "There are two kinds of gods; for the gods are gods, and the priests that are learned in the Vedas and who teach it are human gods." This sentence is taken from the "Brahmana of the Hundred Paths," one of the most important Hindu books. There may be latent in the people a deep religious spirit, but it is not the spirit which actuated the Indo-Aryan on the banks of the Caspian Sea. Since his migration south, faith had been overcast with an obscuring cloud of ritualism; the priests had assumed a pharisaical mask, and strove more for the furtherance of their rites than for the perfection of the race. The Indian was once a man of action, but in the land of the Indus and the Ganges he had changed his nature, and with it the nature of his belief. The interests and ideals which were once the basis of national thought and of national life existed no longer for him. Desire and activity were overgrown by idle speculation and dreaming. The true relation between the spiritual and the real was destroyed; thought itself became distorted; the world about him was peopled with the weird phantasms of his own brain, and life and happiness on earth were crushed beneath diseased fancies. This had Brahminic

titude, the king was anointed by them, "This is your king, O people," they declared; "the king over us Brahmins is Soma." Sprung from the family of Rishis, who composed the Vedic hymns, and in whom alone was vested the sacrificial privilege, they retained control of the sacred books, which were wholly traditional in the beginning, and in consequence they alone were familiar with the most sacred rites required at the sacrifice. They gathered the hymns and traditions of the people, interpolating much to augment their own power, until there was scarcely a trace of chronological distinction between the Rig Veda and the books which follow. In their knowledge lay the secret of their supremacy; for understanding, they declared, is the all-subduing power. "Mighty doth he become, and powerless his enemy, who possesses such knowledge." To them alone belonged the right of teaching and expounding the sacred texts, and also the right to determine the law of caste. The Vashya, or rural caste, the Kashatrya, or warrior caste, might read the Vedas, but only so far as they were taught and explained by the Brahmins. The young Indian of Aryan birth who was not brought at a proper age to a Brahmin teacher to be instructed in the wisdom of the Vedas was considered an outcast. "Into my control," says the Brahmin, "I take thy heart; let thy thought follow my thought; with all thy soul rejoice in my word." Coerced in the master's house, he finally emerged from the tutelage of the priests wrapped in a strange egotism, with a confused conception of the limit between the real and the unreal, his mind, full of airy speculations, shapeless and distorted. The method which he there acquired was an inexplicable groping in darkness, a restless desire to comprehend self and the universe, which nowhere in the world finds a parallel. Into his serious world of thought entered the one conviction which he deeply felt and to which he gave expression: that all things earthly are full of suffering and that there is only one salvation—renunciation and eternal rest.

It must not be forgotten that Gotama, the Buddha, was born, brought up, and lived and died a Hindu. His teaching, far-reaching and original as it was, was Indian throughout. Without the intellectual influence of the Brahmins his work would have been meaningless and impossible. His system was essentially an Indian system, and however it may differ from Brahminism, it was from this source that it derived its elements. In his public life he had constant intercourse with the most cultured and earnest thinkers of India. Wherever he went it was the Brahmins themselves who took the most earnest interest in his speculations, and many of his chief disciples were of the Brahmin caste.

At the foot of the Nepal hills, far to the east of the cradle

of Brahminism, in the city of Kapilavastu, the ruins of which have long since been lost, Siddartha, a noble of the Sakya (powerful) nation, spent his days in opulence and self-indulgence, until, sated, he turned in disgust from the pleasures of this world to a life of abnegation and poverty. He had drunk deeply of the cup of life and was surfeited. He had tasted all the sensual pleasures of the world and had grown weary of them. According to the *Lalila Vistara*, all the splendor which oriental ingenuity could devise surrounded him, and, like a god among heavenly nymphs, he lived, with his three hundred wives and myriad concubines, in sumptuous palaces, soothed by ravishing tones of invisible music. He remembered the teachings of his Brahmin masters; he had heard them discourse on the vanities of life, on the emptiness of desire, and upon Nirvana; and in the midst of his pleasures he longed for that annihilation which he had been taught was the consummation of all to be desired. No doubt he had seen at the palace gates the ascetic monks of the age who were striving to attain perfection by self-chastisement and abnegation, and who, in obedience to the precepts of Brahmana, sought in this manner to rid themselves of lusts, of evil, and of Karma, hoping to attain the end of cravings, the absence of passion, peace, Nirvana. He, too, would assume the garb of a beggar. "Knowing Atman, relinquish desire for progeny, for property and worldly joys, and wander about like a beggar." He had been taught that human nature depends on desire. "From his desire," say the sacred Brahmanas, "will flow his endeavor; according to his endeavor will be the deeds (Karmen) which he performs, and these are the sum of existence." To rid himself of desire then must be his future task; only when he has conquered this can he know Atman. "When man knows Atman why should he cling to things earthly? The first step is understanding; when it has been attained desire will vanish." He was twenty-nine years old, when, cutting off hair and beard, he clothed himself in a loose, yellow garment, and went from home to homelessness, to be known thereafter as the monk Gotama.

Thus he was fulfilling the laws of the Brahmins. The law-books divided the life of the good Brahmin into three stages: The first of these, that of a student, he had attained in his youth; he had passed through the second, the family life, for according to the more authentic records he had at this time a wife and an infant son; and now it remained for him to live in the forest as a recluse, a life of meditation. Accordingly, in the woods of Uruvela (Buddha Gaya, south of Patna), on the river Nerangara (Phalyn), he spent six years in severe chastisement and fasting. The en-

lightenment which he sought, however, did not come to him; and one day, weak with hunger, having fallen in a faint to the ground, he resolved to lead a life less severe, and partaking again of rich food, he warned his fellow-hermits against self-abnegation, as a species of desire. "He, the sublime, spoke to the five monks. Two extremes there are: The one is a life of lust, given to pleasure and enjoyment; this is low, ignoble, unspiritual, useless; the other is a life of self-torture—this is sad, unworthy, useless." (Oldenburg Buddha.) Doubting his motives, his disciples forsook him, leaving him to pursue his new method alone. It is useless to dwell on this period of preparation. It is known that many, in direct consequence of the methods inculcated by Brahmin teachers, finding nothing in their life worth the living, when meted by the dark philosophy of the sacred books, resigned the pleasures of the world, and by ascetic training sought to prepare for the one object, unattainable in a world of strife and desire, complete surcease of sorrow and of pain. The doctrine of the Retreat had long been a favorite one, not only among the Brahmins, but among the numerous Hindu sects, which professed, each in a different way, to solve the mystery of salvation.

During the four times seven days which he spent under a certain tree, since known as the Tree of Knowledge, came Mara, the tempter, to persuade him to enter Nirvana without making disciples, suggesting to him that it was folly to reveal to others what he had attained by incessant struggle. "Truth will be hidden from him who is filled by hatred and desire; toilsome, mysterious, deeply hidden from the senses, is this truth, and he cannot perceive it whose senses are filled with the darkness of earthly striving." (Oldenburg.) Buddha, however, remained true to the object which he had set for himself, and Mara was foiled. At last came to his aid Brahma Sahaspati, from the heaven of the Brahmas, to beg him to continue in his mission and not to give way to doubt or hesitation.

The tendency to find a similarity between the life of Buddha and that of Christ has in no small measure been stimulated by Edwin Arnold's poem, "The Light of Asia." It is well to bear in mind, however, that Arnold's poem was not written with any pretence to scientific truth or exactitude, but rather that it has been the effort of the poet to denude the legend of Buddha, as it is found in the *Lalila Vistara*, of the extravagant myths, and to familiarize it to Christian readers by presenting it in a garb more Christian and far more natural. There is little of truth to be gleaned from the later authorities, to which the *Lalila Vistara* belongs. A degree of accuracy can only be obtained by adhering to the most ancient authority, the Pali tradition of Ceylon, which

replied that he did not desire to die, and thus ended the temptation.¹ The only analogy between the two temptations consists in the idea that in both cases the evil one resists the redemption of mankind ; but this idea is peculiar neither to Buddhism nor Christianity, but is as old as the religious life of mankind.

Having overcome the temptation by Mara, he attains enlightenment ; the monk Gotama becomes Buddha, "the Enlightened." Of this he speaks : "When I learned this and when I beheld this my soul was released from the sin of desire, released from the sin of earthly being, released from the sin of ignorance (not knowing). In the redeemed awakened the knowledge of his redemption. Annihilated is regeneration ; fulfilled the holy pilgrimage. Done is the duty. I will not return again to this world, that I know."

He went forth to preach, and at Benares he delivered to the five monks who, in the forest of Urevela, had deserted him at a time when he was most in need of the tender trust and respect of faithful followers, the sermon which contains the fundamental principles in Buddhism.

He taught them to seek the middle way ; neither to indulge in the pleasures of sense and sensuality, nor by extreme self-mortification to weaken the body or dull all sensibility. "And which is that middle way ? Verily, it is the noble eightfold path :

"Right views (free from superstition or delusion).

"Right aspirations (high and worthy of the intelligent worthy man).

"Right speech (kindly, open, truthful).

"Right conduct (peaceful, honest, pure).

"Right living (bringing hurt or danger to no living thing).

"Right effort (in self-training and in self-control).

"Right mindfulness (the active, watchful mind).

"Right rapture (in deep meditation on the realities of life)."²

He further instructed them concerning the Four Truths, which are not among the doctrines handed down, but which it was given him first to see, then to know, and perfectly to understand.

"This, O recluses, is the noble truth concerning suffering. Birth is painful, and so is old age ; disease is painful, and so is death. Union with the unpleasant is painful ; painful is separation from the pleasant ; and any craving that is unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, the five aggregates which spring from attachment (the conditions of individuality and its cause), they are painful.

¹ *Vid. S. B. E.*, vol. ii., page 52, *et seq.*

² Rhys Davids.

He must put implicit faith in the Dhamma, or the Law, and in him, Buddha, its expounder. Another fetter is the folly of placing too much weight upon the efficacy of good works and ceremonies.

Having overcome these three delusions of self, doubt, and reliance upon works and ceremonies, the Buddhist has entered upon the way of salvation, and can never be turned back. It finally remains for him to break the fetter (4) of sensuality, (5) of ill-will, (6) of the love of earthly life, (7) of desire for a future life, (8) of pride, (9) of self-righteousness, and (10) of ignorance, and having done this he attains Nirvana.

This is the essence of Buddhism, a religion entirely independent of a Supreme Being, of a future life, and of a relation to fellow-beings, inasmuch as these are not useful to the attainment of self-perfection. There is surely no analogy between this ethical creed and the sublime doctrine of Christ. Christianity is the gospel of love. Buddhism the gospel of selfishness. Christianity holds aloft the light of hope in a future life. Buddhism plunges mankind into hopeless annihilation. Of the redemption, of the sorrow and pain from which we are to be redeemed, of the manner in which this redemption is to be accomplished, the preaching of Buddha treats, and of nothing else. God and the world do not concern him; his whole attention is wrapped up in the one effort, to be rid of pain. Christ preaches essentially the love of God, and the love of one's neighbor for the sake of God. God is the centre of all Christian desire. What we do or omit, that we do or omit because it pleases Him. To the Christian, man is as nothing and God is all; to the Buddhist, God is nothing and self is all. Self must be delivered from suffering, not through the grace of God or of the gods, not through the mediation of a redeemer, but man through his knowledge of self must work out his own redemption; he must understand the natural law of development, and by a wise application of this knowledge withdraw from the disastrous result of that law. Buddha is not an atheist, but an agnostic. He does not deny the existence of a God, he simply evades the issue. Max Müller declares that there is not one passage in the canonical books which in the least indicates a belief in a personal God or Creator. Why should he, who has repeatedly declared that redemption comes from within, and is wholly the result of individual effort, even suggest the idea of God? Long before his day the idea of a Supreme Being, if not obsolete, had at least become problematical, and the idea of an all-pervading force which had assimilated the whole pantheon of a remote antiquity was indeed so vague that it suggested nothing to the mind.

The contrast between Christianity and Buddhism does not end

which constitute personality. Through Namarupa one does good works or evil, and through these works begins the existence of another Namarupa.¹ Thus, it is explained, the flame of the lamp ignites the straw, and the flames of the straw ignite the house; but the flames of the lamp are not the same as the flames of the straw, and these are not the same as the flames of the house. Even so the person who does good or an evil deed is another than the person who reaps the fruit thereof. More plainly expressed, the theory is that each human life is merely the link in a long chain of cause and effect; that each link is the result of what has gone before, and will mould the one which is to follow. Merit, or Karma, as the Buddhist calls it, is all that survives after death, and will advance, not the being—the Namarupa—who accumulates this merit, but the result of all which one being has done in a term of existence will invest another who has no conscious identity with himself.

In Buddhism there is no transmigration of souls in the accepted meaning of the term. After death a being is destroyed; another one is called into life. The chain of continuity is a migration of Karma. That which constitutes personality passes away, for it is nothing but a conception of that union of appearances which constitute the individual. It is merit which lives, which is part of Dharma (the world-force), which is never lost but can be overcome only by the struggle of man in the world of expiation. When evil has been overcome, when man has crushed it, when the mind has become clear in the understanding of truth, there is no longer need of existence, no longer need of an union of appearances for the sake of further expiation. Man perfected sinks into nothingness, absolute and eternal. Weary is the spirit of the Indian, seeking rest, eternal rest—rest without fruition, rest without hope and without love. The Christian, too, seeks rest, but it is that rest which he finds in a full knowledge and love of the Divine, so perfect and complete that further strife is needless.²

Buddhism, then, is a religion without God, and without immortality. Stripped of equivocation and of poetic detail, it is nothing but miserable agnosticism, and yet there are those who would compare it to the doctrine of Jesus Christ. How vain the taunt that Christ was a disciple of Buddha, that every word of the Gospels was borne from the East! Even granting that Christ was familiar with Buddhism, is there aught, beyond the moral law implanted by nature in our breasts, which in the former approaches the teachings of the Saviour? The principles of morality are the

¹ Kellogg.

² Comp. *Childers' Pali Dict.*, "Nibbanam," Rhys Davids' *Buddhism*, Kern, *Buddhism*, et al.

little as possible."¹ "Not faith, strengthened by works, not hope in a reward for the good accomplished in this world, not charity to his neighbor, nothing that comprises the great motive of Christian works, is an incentive to the follower of Buddha. It is only essential for him to comprehend the four truths in order to attain perfection and Nirvana; it is only necessary for him to walk in the eightfold path. Righteousness is the lowest degree of moral worth; far higher is meditation and self-contemplation, and highest is wisdom. Morality has worth only as it is useful to an end, in this world, to the enjoyment of a happy life, and to the final absolute end, deliverance."²

Buddhism is not for the poor in spirit, and in this particular it is the opposite of Christianity. The religion of Christ is for all—the lowliest as well as the most enlightened. Being a gospel of love, it comprehends humanity in its all-engrossing scope. Not only he whose mind can comprehend the abstract notions of a speculative belief, but all who are capable of a simple, earnest belief in a loving God, and of a desire to attain by righteous living a union with Him in the life beyond, may reach eternal happiness. Not so the Buddhist. His salvation depends upon knowledge. The gospel preached to him is a mass of abstruse, speculative sophism. Can his understanding grasp it? If so, he may attain enlightenment; otherwise, salvation is not for him. He who is burdened with cares of this world, who has entered upon the fierce struggle of existence for himself, for his wife, and for his children, finds little time or occasion for sophistic speculation, which, according to Buddha himself, will only, after years of severe application, lead to the desired result. Therefore, it is declared that the law is not for those who lead a family life.³ "Family life is suffering, is the seat of impurity. Only he who leads a monastic life can avoid sin." "From a family life comes contamination." "He alone is wise who wanders about homeless, who has resigned all service to his fellow-man, who has lifted himself above the serving of gods, who is free from all service, and whose path is known neither to the gods, to the demons, nor to the men."⁴ Not for him who is a member of the family, nor even to him who clings to the social order, is salvation, but for him who isolates himself from the rest of humankind, becoming an outcast and a beggar. If he crush the love for his wife and child out of his heart, if he learn to regard all men with absolute indifference, if he break all social ties, the consolation remains for him that his merit will in another existence invest something else with a fuller

¹ Kern.

² *Sutta-Nipata*.

³ Oldenburg, *Buddha*, 295.

⁴ Oldenburg's, *Dhamapada*, 411.