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## REMARKS ON BUDDHISM. BY J. ELIOT HOWARD, Esq., F.R.S.

THE subject is one fraught with interest to the Christian mind, as affecting the happiness of so many millions of our fellow-creatures. It has also a special claim on the attention of the Victoria Institute as affording, when viewed in a philosophic spirit, strong confirmation to the truth of Holy Writ. This Institute proposes "to examine and discuss, with reference to final causes, and the more comprehensive and fundamental principles of philosophy proper, based upon faith in the existence of One Eternal God, who in His wisdom *created every thing very good*";\* and yet we see in Buddhism the protest of a very large portion of the human race against every word in the above proposition of philosophy, which seems to us so clear and simple, because we have received these truths with unquestioning submission, as inseparable from the Christian faith.

It is as Christians that we are entitled to thank God for our creation. It is as taking a right view of Christianity, and of our personal interest in its blessings, that we are encouraged under all circumstances to place a cheerful trust in God, and to know that all things work together for good to those who love Him.

Abandoning the hope set before us in the Gospel, the most "advanced" school of German thought discovers that there is a great deal to be said for the views of life presented by the philosophy of which Buddhism, however ancient, is perhaps but a comparatively modern exponent. The philosophy of these writers has "advanced" so far that the sun of their wisdom has passed the autumnal equinox, and is rapidly descending towards the winter of *Nihilism*.

It certainly appears to our conceptions a very shocking assertion, that non-existence is, after all, preferable to existence; but in the grandest and perhaps the oldest treatise on Providence, we find the man suffering under its mysterious visitations inclining to this way of thinking, and desiring "that God would let loose His hand and cut him off."† Not only so, but those who have access outwardly to the inspired records, which might set them right, *may* hold fast the lie, though it burns into their very souls. In all such cases, true charity would lead us to seek to show that a fundamental misconception of the character of God lies at the root of all this pernicious and morbid view of the dealings of Providence.

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\* See "Objects of the Vict. Inst."—Third.  
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† Job vi. 8.

In the archives of the Propaganda at Rome, there exists (or did exist)\* an original letter of Mi-Vang, the Grand Lama of Thibet, to the Pope (date, July 8, 1742), in reply to the objection raised by a Romish missionary to his religion, which he undertook to refute. It reads thus :—

“This my writing is to the Grand Lama of your kingdom (*i.e.* the Pope). Entreat him to impart to me the argument of kindness and to pray for me. . . . In the past, the present, the future—in these three times, I have not understood that there is a law better than ours. It is your happiness alone, O missionary, to hear the exalted name of our law ! May the spirits that are contrary to this law be destroyed.”

What, then, is this law, and what is its object of worship ? We have already heard something of the merits and demerits of the former, and it is not desirable that I should add to this, except one observation, that the measure of benevolence or kindness to which the system tends, seems to me its only recommendation. It has this tendency in common with all mystical forms of thought. Aristotle has the remark that “as many as are superior are also melancholy ;” and there is something not only pleasing and attractive to a certain class of minds in the Indian philosophy, but also that which, by the endeavour it excites to suppress all the fierce passions of humanity, leaves room for the gentler emotions of pity and compassion ; these last being strongly stirred by the view presented of the miseries of the world. “*On every side,*” says the Lama above quoted, “*are infinite pains, even to the spirit.*” The spirits of Jithars, though they do not feed on material things, equally endure the greatest punishments. The infernal ones, condemned, dwell in the fire,—on every side there are infinite torments, and the inhabitants feel the pain and the punishment.”

It will be in some measure intelligible, that in the midst of the miseries attending the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the minds of many Christians should incline to the same manner of looking at things existent around them. Nor shall we be surprised if we find the stream of mysticism and the ascetic doctrines of the East mingling with and corrupting more and more the pure faith of the Gospel as time rolled on its course.

Again, we find in our own history and amidst the fierce contests and religious animosities of the seventeenth century, mystical sects of religionists arose, whose revulsion from the order of things around them had some considerable analogy with the early conflict of Buddhism with Brahminism.

The great glory of the Christian revelation is that it presents before us a personal God and Saviour. It is to this that the Apostle John turns the attention of his readers in his first Epistle, which he writes in conflict with the “seducers” of the day,—Gnostics imbued with the mysticism of the East. He declares that which he had seen and heard, that his hearers

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\* Published in the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* of A. A. Georgius ; also in the *Inquirer* (London, 1839), vol. ii. p. 194.

might with him have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ ; and that so their joy might be full.

The spirit of man cannot cling to a *nonentity*, but, rightly led, it can flee to the embrace of a loving Father. The Buddhist Lama can say that "all punishments proceed from sin," but his system contains no atonement, no power of rolling away sin, no faith in a *Personal Saviour*.

In regard to the object of worship presented to the Buddhist, I remark that the Buddha is nothing more than *man*, a "descendant of the first king of men." For "there are eight qualifications that must be possessed by the being who receives the assurance of becoming a Buddha,"\* of which the first is, "He *must be a man*, and not a *déwa*. It is therefore requisite that the Bódhisat † continually keep the ten precepts, that *he may have the merit to be born as a man*." Second, He must be a male and not a female ; and therefore the Bódhisat must avoid all sins that would cause him to be born as a woman. Third, He must have the merit that would enable him to become a *Rahat*—all evil desire must be destroyed. . . . Fifth, *There* must be the abandonment of the world, and the Bódhisat must become an ascetic. . . . He must exercise a firm determination to become a Buddha, and were he even told that in order to obtain its exalted rank he must endure the pains of hell during four *asankya kap lakshas*, he must be willing to suffer all this for its sake."

It is obvious that the stream cannot rise higher than its source, and if the object of worship be a *failing man*, the worshipper will not attain to any greater exaltation than the one whom he worships.

Now the present Buddha (for he was preceded by 24) passed through a great variety of conditions (some 550 at least) before he was born. In the course of these he acquired a great deal of experience from his intercourse, not only with men but with animals, which he could recount at leisure, and become a very interesting companion ; so that Buddhist literature, which records these conversations, seems to resemble *Æsop's* fables. He was (as recorded in the *Jatakas*) "an ascetic 83 times ; a monarch, 58 ; the *déwa* (spirit) of a tree, 43 ; a religious teacher, 26 ; a courtier, 24 ; a *próhita* brahmin, 24 ; a prince, 24 ; a nobleman, 23 ; a learned man, 22 times ; an *ape*, 18 ; a merchant, 13 ; a man of wealth, 12 ; a deer, 10 ; a lion, 10 ; the bird *Housa*, 8 ; a snipe, 6 ; an elephant, 6 ; a fowl, 5 ; a slave, 5 ; a golden eagle, 5 ; a horse, 4 ; a bull, 4 ; . . . a potter, 3 ; an *outcast*, 3 times ; besides being twice each a fish, an elephant-driver, a rat, a jackall, a crow, a woodpecker, a THIEF, and a pig ; and once each a dog, a curer of snake-bites, a GAMBLER, a mason, a smith, a *devil dancer*, a scholar, a silversmith, a carpenter, a water-fowl, a frog, a hare, a cock, a jungle fowl, and a *kindura*," ‡ whatever that may be. It "is evident" (says Mr. Hardy) "that this list is imperfect" ; but it is sufficient for my purpose

\* See the *Sujáta Játaka*, as translated by Hardy in *Manual of Buddhism*.

† Candidate for Buddhaship.

‡ Page 100.

that it is not very select. To have kept the ten commandments of Buddhism under all these circumstances does not indicate that a very high tone of morality is rendered necessary in so doing.

But there is much more than this to be noted, for the very virtues by which he was entitled to become a Buddha, are full of trampling on the rights of others. In order to renounce the world, he gave in alms, or as charity, his eyes, head, flesh, blood, *children*, *WIFE*, and substance, whether personal or otherwise, as in the Khadirangara birth.\* The sufferings of the poor children given away by the heartless father † to a tyrannical Brahmin in order that the former might attain Buddhahship, are told in a way to excite our compassion." ‡

In various other births he accumulated a great amount of virtue, and set his mind to what is excellent—giving away that which he enjoyed to aid the necessities of others, and regarding with an equal mind those who exercised upon him the most severe cruelties, and those who assisted him and were kind. This may be all very well for a Stoic, but falls far short of Christian forgiveness of injuries. What shall we say to the Tinduka birth, § in which the Bódhisat appears as the king of 80,000 monkeys, and himself *sets fire to the house of an old woman* in order to rescue his troop from danger they had incurred in a plundering expedition ?

I turn from all this and come to the records of the actual life of Buddha on earth ; in which, rejecting all the absurd fables about his conception and birth ("effected without pain," p. 145), I learn the same lessons. On the day on which he was born he walked seven steps towards the north, a lotus rising up at every step, after which he exclaimed, "*I am the most exalted in the world ; I am chief in the world ; I am the most excellent in the world ; hereafter there is to me no other birth !*" || "It was at the utterance of these words, which were spoken as with a voice of a fearless lion, and rolled to the highest of the brahmalokus, that the Brahmas and Dewas assembled to do homage to the new-born prince."

Need I point out the contrast as to the lessons to be learned from the birth of our Lord, and with *his* words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and *learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.*" What is more evident than that this is the very thing which poor sin-ruined man needs—REST! If it were not for this promise, I think *Nirwana* might be the height of his ambition—the object of hope,—if hope that may be called where *hope* is none!

For all the woes of the world Buddhism affords no balm. Stolid resignation is all that it can teach. Attainment it has none, except for those who enter upon and continue in the four paths that lead to *Nirwana*.

\* Page 102.

† Page 121.

‡ The father tears the children from his embrace and gives them up to cruel slavery, exclaiming "May I by this become the *All-knowing.*"

§ Page 113.

|| Page 146.

It would be interesting to follow the history of Buddha until his death in the city of Kusinara (from eating diseased pork), the record of his combat with the Evil One for *the sovereignty of the world*, and the various travesties of Christian verities apparent in this religion ; but it is not necessary that we should take all this trouble to prove Buddhism a failure. In its encouragement of the celibacy of the clergy ; in its absence of all spring of motive for active benevolence ; in its sloth and laziness, under the specious guise of contemplation ; \* it has done much towards corrupting the world, and this more especially through the false view given of the Divine character.

On the other hand, Christianity in its true form attests its heaven-born excellency in every way ; not the least in its practical works of charity and of benevolence abounding on every hand, speaking forth, with a voice that cannot but be listened to, that God is Love.

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\* To meditate on the thirty-two impurities of the body, and on the three truths,—its impermanency, pain, and unreality,—is a highly religious exercise.

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