

Buddhism and Christianity.

Paper by H. DHARMAPALA, of India.



AX MÜLLER says: "When a religion has ceased to produce champions, prophets and martyrs it has ceased to live in the true sense of the word, and the decisive battle for the dominion of the world would have to be fought out among the three missionary religions which are alive: Buddhism, Mohammedanism and Christianity." Sir William W. Hunter, in his "Indian Empire" (1893), says: "The secret of Buddha's success was that he brought spiritual deliverance to the people. He preached that salvation was equally open to all men, and that it must be earned, not by propitiating imaginary deities, but by

our own conduct. His doctrines thus cut away the religious basis of caste and had the efficiency of the sacrificial ritual and assailed the supremacy of the Brahmans (priests) as the mediators between God and man." Buddha taught that sin, sorrow and deliverance, the state of man in this life, in all previous and in all future lives, are the inevitable results of his own acts (Karma). He thus applied the inexorable law of cause and effect to the soul. What a man sows he must reap.

Results of His Own Acts.

As no evil remains without punishment and no good deed without reward, it follows that neither priest nor God can prevent each act bearing its own consequences. Misery or happiness in this life is the unavoidable result of our conduct in a past life, and our actions here will determine our happiness or misery in the life to come. When any creature dies he is born again, in some higher or lower state of existence, according to his merit or demerit. His merit or demerit—that is, his character—consists of the sum total of his actions in all previous lives.

By this great law of Karma Buddha explained the inequalities and apparent injustice of men's estate in this world as the consequence of

acts in the past, while Christianity compensates those inequalities by rewards in the future. A system in which our whole well-being, past, present and to come, depends on ourselves, theoretically leaves little room for the interference, or even existence, of a personal God. But the atheism of Buddha was a philosophical tenet, which, so far from weakening the functions of right and wrong, gave them new strength from the doctrine of Karma, or the metempsychosis of character. To free ourselves from the thralldom of desire and from the fetters of selfishness was to attain to the state of the perfect disciple, Ararat, in this life and to the everlasting rest after death.

Practical Aim
of Buddha's
Teaching.

The great practical aim of Buddha's teaching was to subdue the lusts of the flesh and the cravings of self, and this could only be attained by the practice of virtue. In place of rites and sacrifices Buddha prescribed a code of practical morality as the means of salvation. The four essential features of that code were: Reverence to spiritual teachers and parents, control over self, kindness to other men, and reverence for the life of all creatures. He urged on his disciples that they must not only follow the true path themselves, but that they should teach it to all mankind.

The life and teachings of Buddha are also beginning to exercise a new influence on religious thought in Europe and America. Buddhism will stand forth as the embodiment of the eternal verity that as a man sows he will reap, associated with the duties of mastery over self and kindness to all men, and quickened into a popular religion by the example of a noble and beautiful life.

Here are some Buddhist teachings as given in the words of Jesus and claimed by Christianity:

Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth My sayings and doeth them, he is like a man which built a house and laid the foundation on a rock.

Why call ye me Lord and do not the things which I say?

Judge not, condemn not, forgive.

Love your enemies and do good, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great.

Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.

Be ready, for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

Sell all that ye have and give it to the poor.

Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him: Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?

The life is more than meat and the body more than raiment. Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath he cannot be My disciple.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful in much,

Whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

For behold the kingdom of God is within you.

There is no man that hath left house or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake who shall not receive manifold more in this present time.

Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always.

Here are some Buddhist teachings for comparison:

Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time. Hatred ceases by love. This is an ancient law. Let us live happily, not hating those who hate us. Among men who hate us, let us live free from hatred. Let one overcome anger by love. Let him overcome evil by good. Let him overcome the greedy by liberality, let the liar be overcome by truth.

Teachings for
Comparison.

As the bee, injuring not the flower, its color or scent, flies away, taking the nectar, so let the wise man dwell upon the earth.

Like a beautiful flower, full of color and full of scent, the fine words of him who acts accordingly are full of fruit.

Let him speak the truth, let him not yield to anger, let him give when asked, even from the little he has. By these things he will enter heaven.

The man who has transgressed one law and speaks lies and denies a future world, there is no sin he could not do.

The real treasure is that laid up through charity and piety, temperance and self-control; the treasure thus hid is secured, and passes not away.

He who controls his tongue, speaks wisely and is not puffed up; who holds up the torch to enlighten the world, his word is sweet.

Let his livelihood be kindness, his conduct righteousness. Then in the fullness of gladness he will make an end of grief.

He who is tranquil and has completed his course, who sees truth as it really is, but is not partial when there are persons of different faith to be dealt with, who with firm mind overcomes ill will and covetousness, he is a true disciple.

As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son, so let each one cultivate good will without measure among all beings.

Nirvana is a state to be realized here on this earth. He who has reached the fourth stage of holiness consciously enjoys the bliss of Nirvana. But it is beyond the reach of him who is selfish, skeptical, realistic, sensual, full of hatred, full of desire, proud, self-righteous and ignorant. When by supreme and unceasing effort he destroys all selfishness and realizes the oneness of all beings, is free from all prejudices and dualism, when he by patient investigation discovers truth, the stage of holiness is reached.

Among Buddhist ideals are self-sacrifice for the sake of others, compassion based on wisdom, joy in the hope that there is final bliss for the pure-minded, altruistic individual. The student of Buddha's

Buddhist
Ideals.

religion takes the burden of life with sweet contentment; uprightness is his delight; he encompasses himself with holiness in word and deed; he sustains his life by means that are quite pure; good is his conduct, guarded the door of his senses, mindful and self possessed, he is altogether happy.

H. T. Buckle, the author of the "History of Civilization," says: "A knowledge of Buddhism is necessary to the right understanding of Christianity. Buddhism is, besides, a most philosophical creed. Theologians should study it."

In his inaugural address delivered at the congress of orientals last year Max Müller remarked: "As to the religion of Buddha being influenced by foreign thought, no true scholar now dreams of that. The religion of Buddha is the daughter of the old Brahman religion and a daughter in many respects more beautiful than the mother. On the contrary, it was through Buddhism that India, for the first time, stepped forth from the isolated position and became an actor in the historical drama of the world."

Dr. Hoey, in his preface to Dr. Oldberg's excellent work on Buddha, says: "To thoughtful men who evince an interest in the comparative study of religious beliefs Buddhism, as the highest effort of pure intellect to solve the problem of being, is attractive. It is not less so to the metaphysician and the sociologist, who study the philosophy of the modern German pessimistic school and observe its social tendencies."

Dr. Rhys David says that Buddhism is a field of inquiry, in which the only fruit to be gathered is knowledge.

R. C. Dutt says: "The moral teachings and precepts of Buddhism have so much in common with those of Christianity that some connection between the two systems of religion has long been suspected. Candid inquirers who have paid attention to the history of India and of the Greek world during the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era, and noted the intrinsic relationship which existed between these countries in scientific, religious and literary ideas, found no difficulty in believing that Buddhist ideas and precepts penetrated into the Greek world before the birth of Christ. The discovery of the Asoka inscription of Hirnar, which tells us that that enlightened emperor of India made peace with five Greek kings and sent Buddhist missionaries to preach his religion in Syria, explains to us the process by which the ideas were communicated. Researches into doctrines of the Therapeuts in Egypt, and of the Essenes in Palestine, leave no doubt, even in the minds of such devout Christian thinkers as Dean Mansel, that the movement which those sects embodied was due to Buddhist missionaries who visited Egypt and Palestine within two generations of the time of Alexander the Great. A few writers like Benson, Seydal and Lillie maintain that the Christian religion has sprung directly from Buddhism."