

Studies in Buddhism

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[Page 3] BY a strange misinterpretation of some few phrases, the teachings of Buddha, which are really saturated with convictions concerning the future existence of man after death, have been regarded by a great many European writers as a nihilistic system, embodying the gloomy and desperate belief that life is altogether a curse and the annihilation of consciousness the only purpose worthy of pursuit. In the course of the following pages I shall adduce illustrations of the theory thus propounded by modern European critics of Buddhism; but without overloading this preliminary glance at the situation with elaborate quotations, I may safely sum up the views put forward by Max Müller, Rhys Davids, Bishop Bigandet, Barthélerny St. Hilaire, Spence Hardy, and several others, including the latest and boldest caricaturist of the subject, Dr. Kellog, as embodying the notion just defined. And though Buddhist doctrine has a great deal to say concerning "rebirths", which might not unreasonably beheld to recognise inferentially the continuity of individual consciousness after death, and hence a future life of some kind, the value of this is looked upon as reduced to zero because the person re-born is sometimes described as not the same person who lived previously, but a new person caused to exist by the acts of his predecessors. Cautious critics might, one would have thought, have perceived a paradox suggesting a hidden meaning in the apparent conflict between the theory thus imputed to Buddhism — that each man practically comes to an end at death by virtue of the normal condition of things — and the other theory that it is worth his while to make stupendous efforts and lead a life of terrible self-abnegation in order to compass the result of coming to an end by being "blown out" in Nirvana. Obviously, if annihilation were the end of each individual consciousness, the logical policy would be to eat, drink, sin and be merry as long as it lasted. Why endure desperate privations to accomplish that which must accomplish itself anyhow? And the ingenious explanation given is, that human nature being better really than the Buddhist creed, the candidates for Nirvana exert themselves for the altruistic purpose of extinguishing the fires of "Karma" as far as they are concerned, which would otherwise, after they had passed away, engender other human beings in this suffering world. [Page 4] How a religion which puts such a blank and dreary prospect before each person in turn as that which Buddhism is thus supposed to put, should render this unselfish programme acceptable, is recognised by some of the writers named above as a profound and wonderful enigma. But for scholarship of a certain kind words and phrases are of commanding importance. It counts for nothing if a conclusion is offensive to common-sense and incompatible with our knowledge of human nature. So long as there are texts supported by philological erudition that uphold the theory that Buddha taught any given doctrine, the too scholarly critic will set aside broad and general conclusions out of keeping with such texts as unsubstantial and delusive. It may sometimes, however, be safer to trust broad conclusions than narrow interpretations of language. The notion that hundreds of millions of Buddhists are content in the light of a faith that contravenes the deepest craving of human

nature — and not only this, but that they are able to lead remarkably good lives on a theory that robs them of all hope of reward for so doing, and exempts them from all punishment for evil doing — is infinitely more absurd than the alternative supposition that even the most profound European scholar may misunderstand the language of the Buddhist scriptures. All the more should this reflection have operated to render modern critics of Buddhism cautious in trusting too completely to the literal meaning of phrases, in view of the paradoxical methods of expression that find so much favour with Eastern writers.

In reading them one must always be on the look out for hidden meanings that revolutionise the literal sense of the words employed, and the grandest thoughts are most constantly veiled in a symbology that is not by any means recognisable as such by the graces of poetic character. An apparently straightforward narrative of physical events may be in truth a subtle spiritual allegory: an apparently specific statement may derive all its importance from an unexpressed qualification which the wit of the student is left to supply; and which, when supplied, may be recognised as compatible with the original statement, but which the Eastern teacher may have purposely held back, that it might, when discovered by the student for himself, take hold of his imagination all the more firmly. We now live in an age when writing must be made intelligible for those who run while reading. But that has not been the principle on which Oriental scriptures have been compiled.

Let us first take up the question whether Buddhism teaches the survival of the individual soul after the death of the body, or, as several modern writers have affirmed, its non-existence as an entity apart from the activity of the senses. It seems odd that these inquirers should prefer to go on in reliance on a few phrases culled from the enormous mass of Buddhist books, rather than begin by seeking the living testimony of [Page 5] Buddhist authorities. Sumangala, the High Priest of Ceylon as he is generally called, and one of the foremost, certainly, if not, as I understand, the foremost Buddhist dignitary of the Southern Church, has within the last few years formally sanctioned a Buddhist Catechism, in use now throughout the native schools of Ceylon. His certificate declares that he has "carefully examined" it, and that it is in agreement with the canon of the Southern Church. The first question in this Catechism which touches the point at issue is this: — "What causes us to be reborn?" And the answer is: — "The unsatisfied desire for things that belong to the state of individual existence in the material world". Hasty critics of Buddhism are constantly stumbling over phrases which recognise the escape from the necessity of such rebirth as desirable, and interpreting them to mean that annihilation of individual consciousness is the good aimed at. It is only the desire for individual existence *in the material world* that is reproved. Nowhere will Buddhism be found to contemplate such extinction in *spiritual life* as a desirable result. The texts which are supposed to contemplate such extinction in *Nirvana* have reference really to the enlargement of consciousness acquired by what we call the soul in the remote futurity of its spiritual evolution. That in *Nirvana* consciousness transcends the limitations of individuality is undoubtedly held to be the case by Buddhists, but it is held also that between this life and *Nirvana* there are many gradations of spiritual existence, in the earlier of which individuality is no more forfeited than the identity of a man who moves from one house to another.

Reference to these spiritual conditions of existence is suppressed — not denied — in popular Buddhism. The rebirth on earth is chiefly insisted upon, and the identity of the individual, as we understand identity, through successive rebirths is plainly asserted. In the formula just quoted, for instance, it will be seen that the statement does not contemplate the birth at future periods of some other beings different from ourselves, who are to be the consequences of the "Karma" we have developed, as Dr. Rhys Davids

interprets the doctrine, but unequivocally goes on to explain that "our" merit or demerit controls the state and condition in which "we" shall be reborn — also that "Buddhists do not believe one life long enough for the reward or punishment of a man's deeds during that period". Here surely we have a recognition of identity running through the successive rebirths referred to, and that alone should be admitted as incompatible with the theory that Buddhism teaches the annihilation of the soul.

The only denial which Buddhism really gives in regard to the soul is directed against its *immutability* after death, which Oriental philosophers hold to be implied in the loose way Western theologians employ the word. The whole confusion arises from the play of cross purposes. In the Catechism, [Page 6] for instance, the question is asked: "Does Buddhism teach the immortality of the soul ? and the reply is as follows: "Soul it considers a word used by the ignorant to express a false idea. If everything is subject to change, then man is included and every material part of him must change. That which is subject to change is not permanent, so there can be no immortal survival of a changeful thing". Going on then to explain that the new personality of each succeeding reincarnation is the aggregate of the "Skandhas" or attributes of the last, the Catechism takes up the question whether this new aggregation of Skandhas is the same being as that in the previous birth; the answer is: — "In one sense it is a new being, in another it is not. During this life the Skandhas are constantly changing, and while the man A. B. of forty is identical with the youth A. B. of eighteen, yet by the continual waste and reparation of his body, and change of mind and character, he is a different being. Nevertheless the man in his old age justly reaps the reward or suffering consequent upon his thoughts and actions at every previous stage of his life. So the new being of a rebirth, being the same individuality as before with but a changed form, or new aggregation of Skandhas, justly reaps the consequences of his actions and thoughts in the previous existence".

The simplest common-sense, therefore, applied to the problem will show that Buddhism does not deny that primary idea which Western theologians have in their minds when they talk about the immortality of the soul. It will not accept as correct an impression so inexact metaphysically, but it is grossly misrepresented when Western theologians try to persuade their hearers that it repudiates the fundamental idea which the Western populace associates with the inexact expression. In the sense that the man of forty is the same being that he was at eighteen, the new person reborn is the same being as the former person who generated his Karma, and his mere non-recollection in his new birth of his former adventures is not held by Buddhism at all events to impair the identity. The Catechism deals with the point as follows: "The aged man remembers the incidents of his youth, despite his being physically and mentally changed. Why then is not the recollection of past lives brought over by us from our last birth into the present birth ? Because memory is included within the Skandhas; and the Skandhas having changed with the new existence, a new memory, the record of that particular existence, develops. Yet the record or reflection of all the past lives must survive, for when Prince Siddartha became Buddha, the full sequence of his previous births was seen by him and any one who attains to the state of *Jhana*, can thus retrospectively trace the line of his lives".

The contention with which I put forward these extracts will not be defeated by any one who replies that such an immortality fails to satisfy [Page 7] the aspirations of his mind. The question is whether Buddhism teaches that "there is after death no surviving soul of any man, that the dissolution of the body ends all". [Dr Kellog] Buddhism teaches the exact reverse of this, and all the elaborate criticism on its other teaching, which hostile writers build upon their primary mis-statements of its position in regard to this important tenet, falls to the ground for anyone who understands how the matter really stands.

It is necessary at every step in the investigation of Buddhist doctrine to remember that this was put forward at the period of its development, not as a re-statement of the whole case concerning God and man, but as a development, a purification, or an expansion of the then existing principles of Brahminical philosophy. As Dr. Oldenburg justly remarks: ["Buddha; his Life, his Doctrine, his Order". translated by W. Hoey] — "No one can understand the course which Indian thought has taken without keeping in view the picture with its lights and shadows of this order of philosophers, as the Greeks named the Brahminical caste for Buddhism also this priestly class was the necessary form in which the innermost essence of the Indian people has embodied itself". And a little later on we read — " On this very foundation, centuries after the Brahminical thinkers had laid it, were the doctrine and the Church built which were named after the name of Buddha". Thus no greater mistake can be made than to suppose that Buddhism leaves out of its calculations any given metaphysical idea, merely because it does not explicitly expound this in any translated texts that we are acquainted with so far. Indeed, if we possessed accurate translations of every line of Buddhist Scripture ever written, we should certainly be still without any formal Buddhist authority for a great mass of philosophical conceptions that we should none the less be bound to assume as underlying the Buddhist doctrine.

That the prevalent belief of the people among whom Buddha lived pointed clearly to the survival of the soul after death, is recognised by Dr. Rhys Davids, who in his first Hibbert lecture says:— "With regard to the internal spirit, the soul of man, the old Aryans believed that the soul survived after the body which enclosed it had passed away" (p. 15). The Upanishads are represented in the same book as teaching "that there was something far better, far higher, far more enduring than the right performance of sacrifice; that the object of the wise man should be to know inwardly and consciously the great soul of all; and that by this knowledge his individual soul would become united with the Supreme Being, the true and absolute Self.....". "The distinguishing characteristic of Buddhism". [Page 8] Dr. Rhys Davids goes on to say — flatly, for no reason whatever, affirming the reverse of the truth which the more reflective Dr. Oldenburg has impressed on his readers, as shown above — " was that it started on a new line it swept away from the field of its vision the whole of the great soul theory". (Hibbert Lectures, p. 29.) The author of this extravagant statement himself supplies the means of disproving it, for in the course of a conversation with a young Brahman on the claims of the Brahmans to be a superior caste, he represents Buddha as saying: — "How think you, Assalayana — a man who is a murderer, a thief, a libertine, a liar, a slanderer, violent or frivolous in speech, covetous, malevolent, given to false doctrine — will such a one, if he be a Kshatrya, or a Vessa, or a Sudda, be born after death, when the body is dissolved, into some unhappy state of misery and woe, but not if he be a Brahman?" Assalayana, replies that the Brahman is in this respect exactly on a par with the others. Gotama then proceeds to put the contrary case, when Assalayana declares that those that do the contrary of all these evil things are equally re-born into some happy state in heaven, whether they are Brahmans or whether they are not. (Hibbert Lectures, p. 53.)

How can a man be "re-born into a happy state in heaven", if we are to hold the great soul theory as swept away ? The plain truth of the case is that in all he says Buddha takes for granted the survival of the soul after death — as a fundamental familiar doctrine, or even fact of consciousness, which no spiritual student could want to debate about. The creed of the Buddhists is thus established on a view of the soul's survival after death that is elaborate, vivid and far-reaching. No form of religious persuasion in the world is more deeply coloured than Buddhism by an intimate realisation of the idea that the destinies of man are concerned with a far larger sphere of existence than can be supplied by his physical body. It is just because of the overwhelming importance assigned by Buddha and his cultivated followers to real existence as contra-distinguished from existence on the physical plane of nature as an incarnate being,

that the incarnate existence itself is spoken of sometimes with contempt or indifference, whenever Buddha is found to disparage existence. In any of the numerous passages that have been taken to imply that he recommended annihilation as a goal to pursue, it will always be perceived by any one who reads his words with an understanding open to the interpretation thus supplied, that he is merely disparaging physical existence in the perishable body, or even existence in the earlier conditions of relatively immaterial life, which, though less so than the physical life, are still transitory conditions of being as compared with the sublime developments beyond these, towards which the internal resources of the highly spiritualised man enable him to reach upward. [Page 9]

One other simple caution will enable us to enter with confidence on the examination of such translated texts as are available for the purpose of the present argument. Most of his doctrinal discourses are addressed by Buddha to his monks — "the brethren", the disciples who had adopted an exclusively religious life, the object of which was to secure the highest spiritual achievement after death, not merely a state of prolonged happiness in heaven, terminating in a return to physical existence and a re-birth on earth. In all such discourses the teacher takes for granted the desire on the part of those he is addressing to escape the trammels of physical life and the transitory conditions of all existence short of Nirvana.

But one remarkable passage in the Maha-Paranibbana Sutta, as translated by Dr. Rhys Davids (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XL, page 16), records a short address he delivers to certain "householders" — followers of his teaching, but persons who were not engaged in the supreme attempt to compass Arhatship. And here there is no ambiguous language to mislead the simple understanding of too literal readers. The passage is as follows: "Then the Blessed One addressed the Patalagama disciples, and said:— ' Fivefold, oh householders! is the loss of the wrong-doer through his want of rectitude. In the first place the wrong-doer devoid of rectitude falls into great poverty through sloth; in the next place his evil repute gets noised abroad; thirdly, whatever society he enters, whether of Brahmans, nobles, heads of houses, or Samanas, he enters shyly and confused; fourthly, he is full of anxiety when he dies; and lastly, on the dissolution of the body after death, he is reborn into some unhappy state of suffering or woe. This, oh householders ! is the fivefold loss of the evil-doer'.

"Fivefold, oh householders, is the gain of the well-doer through his practice of rectitude. In the first place the well-doer, strong in rectitude, acquires great wealth through his industry; in the next place, good reports of him are spread abroad; thirdly, whatever society he enters, whether of nobles, Brahmans, heads of houses, or members of the order, he enters confident and self-possessed; fourthly, he dies without anxiety; and lastly, on the dissolution of the body after death, he is reborn into some happy state in heaven. This, oh householders! is the fivefold gain of the well doer'. " One cannot easily understand the state of mind of a writer who, himself putting forward such a passage as this as part of the teaching of Buddha, yet contrives to imagine that the teachings of Buddha do away with the great soul theory, and rest on the blank nihilism of the assumption that when any given man dies there is a final end of him.

The mistake has apparently arisen from the inability of many European writers to put a proper interpretation on Buddha's sayings regarding transitory and permanent states of being. First of all, periods of time of very great duration are nevertheless spoken of by Buddha as transitory. A good [Page 10] illustration of this may be found in the Maha-Sudarsana Sutta, describing according to Dr. Rhys Davids' translation, "The Great King of Glory" This personage was a marvellous monarch of some fabulous period in the past — the account of his life given in the Sutta being highly allegorical — who was

the recipient of wonderful gifts at the hands of the gods, and who lived for periods time described in the passage I am about to quote. Buddha is supposed to be speaking and telling the story to his disciple Ananda:—

"For eight and forty thousand years, Ananda, the Great King of Glory lived the happy life of a prince; for eight and forty thousand years he was Viceroy and heir apparent; for eight and forty thousand years he ruled the kingdom; and for eight and forty thousand he lived as a layman the noble life in the Palace of Righteousness. And then, when full of noble thoughts, he died; he entered after the dissolution of the body the noble world of BrahmaI at that time was the Great King of Glory. Mine were the four and eighty thousand cities, etc., etc.....See, Ananda, how all these things are now past, are ended, are vanished away. Thus impermanent, Ananda, are component things; thus untrustworthy, Ananda, are component things; inasmuch, Ananda, is it meet to be weary of, is it meet to be estranged from, is it meet to be quite set free from, the bondage of all component things". (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XL, p. 288)

In passing, to guard against a natural misconception, it may be pointed out that the Great King of Glory's entry into the world of Brahma at his death is not equivalent to the union with Brahma, the attainment of Nirvana, at which the Buddhist ascetic aims.

The King is supposed to have been an almost faultlessly good man, whose virtues are described in glowing terms, but still he lived as a worldly king of glory, though filled with beautiful thoughts and aspirations. His great happiness on earth was succeeded in due time by a happiness of corresponding amplitude and duration in Heaven, but he had not finally shaken off the fetters of *existence* — that is to say, physical existence on earth — and was ultimately reborn. Of what avail therefore, were his 192,000 years of happy life with a period of heaven to match them. From the point of view of Buddhist philosophy that is not a sufficiently long reward to be the goal of such efforts as are prescribed to the ascetic.

On the other hand it must be remembered that by the same philosophy no states of being — not even the state of the Nirvana — can be immutable. Every conceivable state of being must be subject to change in the progress of eternity. Passages will be found in Buddhist writings recognising that idea, and they in their turn will be misunderstood sometimes in this way. European creeds have accustomed many people to regard the heavenly [Page 11] life as eternal, and even to imagine — therefore to assume — that any one who denies eternity as an attribute of the life after death is denying the life after death altogether. That which is final in Nirvana, according to Buddha's teaching, is exemption from rebirth on earth as an incarnate human being; that is, the "utter passing away" of which Buddha speaks as happening in the case of one who has attained the Nirvanic development: and in regard to the nature of the changes which await him in the ultimate future — in which such periods as the 192,000 years spoken of above would be as a drop in the ocean — the public discourses of the great teacher are naturally silent. A philosopher who recognises the true significance of the word eternity is not likely to fall into the mistake of assuming that the finite understanding of incarnate men on one planet among the innumerable host of planets in the universe would be in a position to grapple usefully with problems lying beyond its reach. The doctrine to be taught is the doctrine of final escape from the fetters of physical existence and rebirth on that one planet. The rest to be learned must concern — not the inhabitants of that planet but — the Nirvanee.

It would be futile to dispute over the verbal significance of English translations of Buddhist texts as bearing on the points before us, in face of the overwhelming fact that the Catechism, which states the case as we have shown, is endorsed by the principal Buddhist authority of the Southern Church, the more materialistic of the two great schools of Buddhist thought. There is something ludicrous in the vanity of scholars who profess to know better than the foremost representatives of Buddhism what Buddhism is. The texts on which they proceed in forming their hypothesis are open to the inspection of the Oriental as well as the Western students of Pali and Sanscrit, and the born Orientalists are not restricted to a verbal interpretation of these, as they have the clue, not only to the dictionary meanings of words, but to their figurative and metaphysical connotations. However by the light of much that has been made public of late in regard to the inner spirit of Buddhist teaching, the bare texts themselves — even in English, and even as they stand translated by scholars impressed with the notion that the tendency is Nihilistic — are luminous with spiritual meaning, often of a very exalted kind. All the passages in Buddha's teaching, which are blindly quoted in support of the theory that he taught the annihilation of each human entity at death, are merely aimed at getting people to realise that the higher life of the true ego is not clogged for ever with the sordid and insignificant details of each physical existence. These are shaken off according to Buddhist doctrine in real existence; unless, indeed, by the saturation of the soul with low-minded instincts it is bound down to a recollection of them even after death. On this branch of the subject, however, the orthodox Ceylon Catechism is [Page 12] naturally silent: for no teaching concerning the relatively spiritual — the immediate super-physical adventures of the soul after death — would be permitted by Buddhist priests in a manual intended for the populace. All readers of the most elementary Buddhist books must be aware that Buddha taught one view of things to the laity, and much more that was never made public to his monks. The modern representatives of his system tenaciously adhere to the same rule. Much indeed that pertains to the more elaborate doctrine can be now found out on inquiry by uninitiated students, but for a school catechism obviously the simplest exoteric view of the teaching would be put forward. For the simple populace the warning or temptation of the future life on earth is treated as a sufficient inducement to good conduct. All reference therefore to other kinds of future life, when published outside the seclusion in which the higher doctrine was taught, has always been veiled in more or less ambiguous language.

For it is not put forward by Buddha as the primary purpose of his teaching that men should be tempted to lead good lives by the hope of attaining heavenly bliss. On the other hand, the theory that the rewards of good life will accrue in heaven, instead of being denied by Buddhism, is treated always as an utter matter of course. Everybody already knew that Buddha was not re-stating a code of religious truth from the A.B.C. of the matter, but calling the attention of men ripe to contemplate so stupendous a conception to the transitory character even of the heavenly state which follows in the normal course the good man's life on earth. It might be prodigiously prolonged, still it was transitory; and the force of his instructions was almost all directed to the stimulation of zeal for that higher emancipation from the necessity for any return to such earth life as we are familiar with, which it was his special care to show might conduct men to Nirvana.

None the less do his utterances sometimes include casual references to the recognised truth concerning heaven.

The Dhammapada, translated by Professor Max Müller in Vol. X. of the Sacred Books of the East, is not merely one of the canonical books of the Buddhist Scripture, but is specially Buddha's own teaching. The translator even says, referring to certain commentaries by Buddhaghosha:— " In explaining the verses of

the Dhammapada, the commentator gives for every or nearly every verse a parable to illustrate its meaning which is likewise believed to have been uttered by Buddha in his intercourse with his disciples, or in preaching to the multitude that came to hear him." Certainly then we may take the Dhammapada, if anything, to be Buddhist doctrine, and here are some fragments: —

"The evil-doer mourns in this world and he mourns in the next; he mourns in both. He mourns and suffers when he sees the evil of his own work. [Page 13]

"The virtuous man delights in this world and he delights in the next he delights in both. He delights and rejoices when he sees the purity of his own work.

"The evil-doer suffers in this world and he suffers in the next; he suffers in both. He suffers when he thinks of the evil he has done; he suffers more when going on the evil path.

"The virtuous man is happy in this world and he is happy in the next; he is happy in both. He is happy when he thinks of the good he has done; he is still more happy when going on the good path".

And again a little later on:—

"Some people are born again; evil-doers go to hell; righteous people go to heaven; those who are free from all earthly desires attain Nirvana."

How a man who has dug up these clear and explicit aphorisms from the original mine of the Pali manuscripts can write of the faith to which they appertain as Professor Max Müller writes of Buddhism, is a puzzle not easy to solve. If the argument had been that these verses do not tell us very much about the conditions of spiritual life that constitute heaven and hell, that might have been a valid objection; though such a criticism would overlook the fact that such passages were evidently addressed in all cases to the multitude, and were only intended to be broad statements of the simplest truths — while the subtle spiritual teaching which Buddha was specially anxious to convey was addressed to the advanced disciples.

But to argue in face of unequivocal declarations — repeated with the amplitude of Oriental style — about the spiritual future in store for good men and for bad, that Buddhism did not recognise after-states for the soul, but treated the death of the physical body as the end of all things, is certainly to cling to an opinion in spite of considerations that should overturn it, on the principle — "*tant pis pour les faits*".

A writer on Buddhistic Theosophy in the *Church Quarterly Review* for October, 1885, condemns the system in unmeasured terms on the strength of statements concerning it which are altogether the reverse of truth. He begins by saying that between the Northern and Southern types of Buddhism there is surprisingly little in common. That is not the opinion of cultivated Buddhists, but simply an erroneous view arising from the fact that English writers on Northern or Tibetan Buddhism have been greatly misled by

accounts of that system given by Roman Catholic Missionaries, anxious to show, regardless of chronology, that Lamaism was derived from Christianity. It might as well be argued that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are a plagiarism on Voltaire, but we need not go into that point at length. The Southern form of Buddhism is the simpler and more materialistic, in the sense that it does not attempt to grapple with some extremely recondite metaphysical subtleties dealt with even in the exoteric [Page 14] writings of the Northern school, but the two schools are the same in essentials, and are less divergent than the Protestant and Roman Churches as forms of Christianity. The tendency of this "quasi-religion" to heterogeneity, says the writer in the *Church Quarterly*, proceeding on the basis of his false assumption as if it were an absolute fact, is due to its fragmentary character. He thus explains a state of things which does not exist by an assertion which is not the fact: and then he develops the assertion. "The system does not itself possess — a *theology*. For Buddhism proper has no conception of the Divine, no consistent eschatology, no feeling for the world and for temporal things beyond an impatient loathing and repulsion. Its entire energy is concentrated in the effort to undo and shake off all relations between the soul and its material environment. Success in this constitutes Nirvana, an ascent into the Atman — that is the unchangeable, the absolute, the *ens realissimum*, — or, strange to say, the everlasting Negative".

Every clause of this sentence, every implication it makes is erroneous, and most of them are diametrically so. The only one which has a superficial resemblance to the truth is the first — that Buddhism has no theology. It may not have what the *Church Quarterly Review* would mean by a theology. But it has a profound science of divine things, and directly the writer before us drops his technical expressions and puts what he means in the abstract form — when he says that Buddhism has no conception of the divine — he makes a statement which, for earnest students of the higher Buddhism, could only be paralleled by saying of chemistry that it is a system which does not itself possess a microscope and has no conception of minuteness.

The strange contradictions of Buddhism, our author thinks, are due to its being a re-action — a product of "profound weariness of human life", of a suicidal asceticism. Here the cart is very simply put before the horse, and the recognition of that will render intelligible not merely the mistakes of many Western writers concerning Buddhism, but the mistaken excesses of some among its own devotees, which fortify and lend some colour to these mistakes. The Buddhist ascetic of the higher kind, guided by Buddha's injunctions to those who seek the monastic life, or by that unwritten lore of Eastern philosophy which operates still more potently in the same direction — forgoes the pleasure of physical existence not in loathings for them as such, but from a clear perception of the fact that, being transitory, they can give no enduring happiness, and because he realises that there is a higher spiritual life to be attained by physical self-denial. Because he does not advertise this in the *Times* and explain his motives beforehand to friends in England, the Western Orientalist calmly assumes that he is a crazy fool, acting without any motives, [Page 15]

"Buddhism, then", says our reviewer, advancing still from one misconception to another, blindly unaware of the fact that all his premises have given way behind him, "has two aspects. In the first and more pleasing, it is an ethical rule, embodying certain of the truths of natural religion. In the second and later, it is an indeterminate system of auto-logical philosophy".

"Indeterminate" only in the sense that its philosophy is held to be too intricate for the world at large, and has therefore been hitherto reserved for the study of the few who devote their lives to its comprehension. The ethical rules of popular Buddhism are designedly kept down to the simplest terms for the

comprehension of the people at large. Doctrine in its higher details is reserved for the initiates.

But even in commenting on "this rule", the writer before us misstates its significance. "Indeed, the only *good* life, according to Buddhist standards, is the monastic". He might have been guarded, one would have thought, from this particular misconception — which almost comically inverts the truth — by remembering that the Buddhist system is so organised that the doctrinal instruction required for the ascetics who seek to hasten their spiritual growth, is kept back from the people at large, who are only supplied with as much ethical teaching as is required for men *content* to live a good life and float along on the normal stream of evolution. "Every good Buddhist", we are *now* told, "*must* be a monk, and so only can Nirvana, *i.e.*, salvation, be attained". The reverse is really taught by Buddhist writings. The monk is he who endeavours to hasten the process by abnormal efforts. "Beyond this call to all alike to embrace the ascetic life" — which Buddhism does *not* make, but which the article before us has wrongly supposed that it makes — Buddhism has no gospel to proclaim to the world; and it is certain that a mere gospel of despair can have little or no element of real permanence in it" ; and then follows a quotation from Dr. Oldenburg's "Buddha", describing how the Buddhist turns away with weariness from this life, "which promises to the cheerful sturdiness of an industrious struggling people thousands of gifts and thousands of good things", and this weariness is indicated as having written itself, "in indelible characters in the whole of the wonderful history of this unhappy people".

The *Church Quarterly* reviewer might have permitted his readers to perceive that he was not rightly interpreting this "weariness", and this "mournful history" if he had gone on with the whole quotation. Dr. Oldenburg proceeds to point out that the character of Buddhist pessimism would be misunderstood if it were regarded as infused with " a feeling of melancholy which bewails an endless grief, the unreality of being."

The true Buddhist, . . . feels compassion for those who are yet in [Page 16] the world for himself he feels no sorrow for he knows he is near his goal which stands awaiting him, noble beyond all else.....He seeks Nirvana with the same joyous sense of victory in prospect with which the Christian looks forward to his goal". The gospel of despair" does not seem a phrase appropriately applied to the message on which he relies; and Dr. Oldenburg, from whom our critic clips a disjointed phrase which totally fails to convey the general drift of his argument, deals with the whole subject mainly to combat the idea that the creed of Buddhism is nihilistic. Far on in his book he writes: "Does this end of earthly existence imply at the same time the total cessation of being? Is it the nothing which receives the dying perfect one into its dominion ? Step by step we have prepared the ground, so as now to be able to face this question", and then with the natural prolixity of a German philosopher, but in unmistakable language, he shows that no such gloomy teaching is really conveyed by the Buddhist writings which have been erroneously supposed to bear that significance.

Dr. Oldenburg is far from having divined the real clue to the ambiguity of language in many of the Buddhist texts he so patiently weighs and analyses; but he is equally far — much further — from the upside down view of the subject which the *Church Quarterly* tries to make him support.

The four noble truths relating to the futility of physical life as a source of happiness, the desire of physical life as the cause by which souls are drawn back into incarnation, the neutralisation of this cause by the extinction of desire for physical life, and the possibility of extinguishing such desire only by a life of

holiness, are interpreted by the writer before us as "resting on the axiom that existence is in itself suffering", and therefore that the only remedy is to become as nearly as possible as though one were not living. Again, the misunderstanding is ludicrous to the esoteric student of Buddhism and glaring to anyone made acquainted with the spiritual science of the East on which the policy of the Buddhist monk in pursuing the ascetic life entirely depends. "A pessimism so thoroughgoing and deadly could hardly, it would seem, take a very general possession of any race in whom the vital forces were strong". By modern pessimists, I believe, the inner philosophy of Buddhism, on which the asceticism and reincarnations of its monks altogether rest, is condemned, not as being too pessimist, but as being incurably optimist — pointing to a great preponderance of happiness in the long run as a consequence of existence — reckoning physical, plus *spiritual* existence in one great account, but as usual the verdict of the *Church Quarterly* writer is wrong in that complicated manner which has to do as well with false inferences as with false bases. The sentence just quoted recast-should stand: — a system of optimism so purely spiritual and so pitiless on the passions of the flesh, which are the [Page 17] weaknesses of the spirit, could hardly, it would seem, take a very general possession of any race in whom the vital forces were strong. And thus we arrive at a recognition side by side with our author, of the fact that the intensely material generations of man steeped to the lips in our highly developed civilisation, are not in natural affinity with the Buddhist system of thought. That is quite true of our contemporary race as a whole, but it is true not because we are too spiritual for Buddhism, but because so far Buddhism has been too spiritual for us.

So ill does our reviewer understand the doctrine of metempsychosis "adopted by Gautama *sub-silentio*", that he thinks it can hardly be said to blend well with the other features of his system. So far is it really from conflicting with these that it constitutes the keystone of the whole system, without which it could not have been developed; from which all its doctrines of reincarnation spring, in reference to which all those reproaches are aimed at "existences", which the literal caricaturists of Buddhism pick up to support the monstrous theory that Buddha taught annihilation as a fact of nature, and as an object of desire. The correct appreciation of the true Buddhist doctrines of metempsychosis — or rather of the evolution of man's soul through a long series of physical, incarnations (not its descent into lower animal forms merely employed, when mentioned at all, in such a connection to symbolise human passions) will guard anyone from the thousand misconceptions concerning the drift of Buddha's utterances as recorded by the exoteric writings in a somewhat enigmatical form. That doctrine is not peculiar to Buddhism. It runs through all Indian philosophy, and is accepted as a practical fact of nature by every spiritually educated Hindoo, as well as by every Buddhist.

The ground on which the reviewer supposes the doctrine of rebirths to be inconsistent with (what he wrongly imagines to be) other features of the Buddhist system, is worth a moment's notice. He says — "For unquestionably the continued existence of an individual in one life after another implies the immortality of the soul, or principle of personality. Now, Buddhism denies both the terms of this affirmation — the fact of immortality, and even the existence of the human soul". The looseness of language which thus uses the infinitely significant expression "immortality", as synonymous with survival after the death of the body, is at the root of the mistake here.

Buddhism does not deny — it affirms in a score of ways — the survival of the human ego, or soul, through an enormous period of time — for millions of ages. But it recognises the law of progress and cyclic evolution as inherent in all natural processes, and therefore it perceives that the personality of any given man of one place in evolution must ultimately be destined to such transcendent elevation in the

scale of nature — unless [Page 18] indeed, at a very much later stage of that growth than any we need talk about for the present it should fail — that, as I have already shown, it regards the term immortality as unscientific and inaccurate and therefore makes no use of it. Buddhism does not deny that which Western writers may generally intend to affirm when they employ the term "immortality" — it denies only the connotations of that term as severely thought out. In a frequently quoted passage which the reviewer once more brings forward to show that Buddha, as he thinks, denies the "permanence of the Ego" (meaning the survival), Ananda asks Buddha why he had given no answer to the wandering monk Vacchagotta, who had asked him questions about the soul. Buddha explains in the replete and circuitous language of Oriental exposition, that if he had said, "the Ego is", the monk would have misunderstood him to mean that the soul remained for ever unchangeable, which would be contrary to the ultimate law of spiritual evolution. If he had said "the Ego is not", he would have been misunderstood to be affirming the doctrine of annihilation. Anyone acquainted with the subtlety and range of the esoteric doctrine will appreciate his reluctance to open up any of its intricacies in a conversation that could not afford an opportunity of developing them in detail. The *Church Quarterly* reviewer follows up the quotation of the Vacchagotta passage with a misleading quotation from Dr. Oldenburg's comment thereon. "Dr. Oldenburg", he says, "observes with perfect justice, if Buddha avoids the negation of the existence of the Ego, he does so in order not to shock a weak-minded hearer".

Dr. Oldenburg's real meaning is quite inadequately conveyed by this bald sentence, as will be appreciated by anyone who will refer to page 266 of his book, where he says: — "If anyone describes Buddhism as a religion of annihilation, and attempts to develop it therefrom as from its specific germ, he has in fact succeeded in wholly missing the main drift of Buddha and the ancient order of his disciples".

This is just what has been done by the writer in the *Church Quarterly Review*, and "missing the main drift" to begin with, he builds a quantity of irrelevant criticism concerning the collateral doctrines of Buddhism on his own wrong conclusions as to what the system affirms and denies. Thus he sets out to examine the theory of "Karma" by remarking "the system does not, as we have seen, acknowledge a soul or principle of individuality". He might as well set out to examine an astronomical speculation concerning the new star in Andromeda by saying, "the system, as we have seen, does not acknowledge the existence of matter outside the limits of Neptune's orbit". Just what an astronomical treatise beginning with that assumption might be expected to turn out — such is our reviewer's discourse on Karma. It is difficult to handle within a short compass, as it would be difficult to correct the outlines of a face looked at through a piece of corrugated [Page 19] glass. It is an altogether fantastic misunderstanding of the matter, in which even Dr. Rhys Davids' misunderstanding is taken as the starting-point of a more aggravated perversion of the original doctrine.

That, in spite of being ghastly nonsense — which indeed it would be if it were what our reviewer represents it — Buddhism has been provoking a revival of sympathy of late years, is a fact which he then proceeds to consider, taking up as the "marked sign of the growth of this Neo-Buddhism . . . the activity and rapid extension of what is known as the Theosophical Society". He quotes largely from, and in connection with this branch of his subject exclusively discusses, the first of the books I have written bearing upon the Theosophical movement — the "*Occult World*". As the title of the far more important work, "*Esoteric Buddhism*", stands amongst those which head the article, it is difficult to understand why he has ignored that, almost every page of which has some bearing on the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, while the "*Occult World*" is a mere preliminary narrative of the very curious and interesting circumstances under which I was first drawn into the earnest study of Eastern esoteric philosophy. I have

nothing to apologise for, nothing to retract in that original narrative, and I have never seen any criticism of the incidents recounted in that book which I could not have brushed away, and shown to be empty and valueless and illogical in open discussion with the authors thereof, but the book has scarcely anything to do with Buddhist Theosophy, and this fact may suffice to suggest how completely the writer in the *Church Quarterly* has failed to do justice to the modern current of thought he describes as the Neo-Buddhism of the Theosophical Society. The statements in " Esoteric Buddhism " concerning the view of nature taken by some thinkers in the East have been presented to the Western world on their own merits. Here, I assert, is a system of thought manifestly — as we who put it forward conceive — coherent with the intention of a great many important Oriental writings, wonderfully consistent and harmonious in itself, constituting, in our opinion, the grammar of all Theosophical thinking, woefully as this has sometimes gone astray.

We find that when, for the first time, this system is set forth in plain language, cultivated Brahmins, as well as Buddhists, say (*vide* correspondence in *The Theosophist*): — Yes, that is our view of things; we have always been familiar with the leading ideas of that statement". The more we who have seriously taken up the study, apply our system as a key to the painful riddles of the earth, the more satisfactorily we find it to solve problems which seemed before to be hopeless. How irrelevant therefore at this time of day does it not seem for people who hear that there is such a movement of thought in the world to say, "The man who has been instrumental in putting these thoughts afloat wrote a book some years ago about incidents [Page 20] which seem very trivial, compared with the destiny of the soul". *Per se* in their relation to occult physics, those incidents do not seem to me either trivial or unimportant, but they have no intellectual connection whatever with the principles of "Buddhistic Theosophy". The writer in the *Church Quarterly* therefore does not seem to me entitled to congratulations on the judgment with which he has discussed them at great length, while evading all considerations of my other book entirely devoted to the subject he endeavours to treat, and replete with explanations which show the views he entertains to be erroneous.

Dr. Kellog's recent work — "The Light of Asia and the Light of the World" — is an attack on Buddhism, especially designed to warn people from accepting the favourable view of that religion presented in Sir Edwin Arnold's poem. The author, he himself says in the preface, "made up his mind long ago . . . that the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . is in a sole and exclusive sense the saving truth of God". His purpose therefore is to present what he conceives to be the tenets of Buddhism in a repulsive aspect and continually to call the reader's attention to the theory that such doctrines claim to be the Light of Asia. Unfortunately for the view he wishes to establish, the doctrines which he describes to be those of Buddhism are always at variance with and generally the exact reverse of what Buddhism really teaches. For example, he says: "To sum up the case, so far is it from being true that the soul's immortality is a radical doctrine in Buddhism, and this doctrine one of its points of contact with Christianity, as has been asserted; even the existence of the soul is not admitted and the affirmation of its being is specially stigmatised as a heresy. There is nothing but 'name and form', that is all. No God! no revelation! no soul! and we are told that Buddhism is the Light of Asia!"

This passage is reproduced with an infinitude of variations throughout the book. The author makes a quotation from some Buddhist text: totally misapprehends it: infers from it that such and such a grotesque is a doctrine of Buddhism, and cries out what a shocking religion this is! And each misapprehension of this kind is in turn employed to fortify a denial that some other passage legitimately bears the spiritual meaning some other writers may have imputed to it. Thus Dr. Kellog tries to show that Nirvana merely

means the attainment of a negative condition of existence in this life. "For according to Buddhist authorities, when a man dies his body having perished, there remains no other part of him which can continue to exist. This is as true of the worldly as of the religious man". ' So all the passages in Buddhist writings which seem plainly to show that Nirvana is a state of existence enjoyed after death — a very glorious kind of spiritual existence — are put aside as deprived of all significance by reason of — Dr. Kellog's primary blunder about the "heresy of individuality" and [Page 21] the denial by Buddhist authorities of immutability as a condition of the life after death. And building one misconception on another in a way which would be amusing for its absurdity if it were not annoying to have great ideas caricatured, he goes on to describe "what the Buddhists call by way of destruction *Parimbhana*, the supreme Nirvana". This he understands to be the attainment of such an utterly negative existence, that the man achieving such a state develops no Karma to be the cause of another (!) man later on. "Nothing now remains in the man which could entail any moral necessity for the production at his death of a being who should reap the fruit of his Karma. In other words, that particular continuous chain of personal existence in which I, for example, as now existing am a single link, is merely brought to an end".

The real doctrine of "*Parimbhana*" as Dr. Kellog writes it, following the Pali spelling here, though he uses the Sanscrit spelling in the positive form of the word, can only be grasped after the true meaning of Nirvana is understood. All the spiritual beatitude which the human mind in its present (usual) state of development can think of — the most vivid consciousness, the most intense emotion, the most overwhelming happiness — is attainable in the spiritual states (the devachanic states) intervening between the physical rebirths of the same entity. But in the course of an enormous futurity, the soul thus periodically bathed in a spiritual bliss which, though spiritual, has still some affinities with the higher emotions of earthly existence and individual consciousness, becomes ripe for a spiritual state which, in some way that we may talk about but which certainly few of us will realise, is enormously elevated above and superior on the cosmic scale to the devachanic state. This is the state of Nirvana, and in a way which is wholly and entirely beyond the reach of a finite conception Para-Nirvana is the superlative degree of Nirvana — a condition of existence so godlike that speculation concerning it is hardly more practical for the Theosophist than for a student of science, speculation concerning the molecular physics of Sirius. However, though the primary meanings of Nirvana and Para-Nirvana are as thus described, a secondary meaning attaches, at all events, to the word Nirvana. It is held by Buddhists that a psychological development is possible for some men even during physical life, which enables their inner consciousness to span the enormous gulfs which separate the normal man of the age from the normal man of a remote future. And by certain courses of very arduous training superimposed upon physical organisms born with appropriate attributes, it may happen that living men may not alone be enabled in trance to pass into the spiritual conditions of existence next adjacent to our own, but even in extraordinary cases taste or "attain" Nirvana — thus anticipating the natural psychic evolution of eons. To no one with even the comprehension of the matter that the last few sentences [Page 22] may have suggested, will the apparent contradictions to be discovered in the Buddhist writings on the subject of Nirvana present the smallest difficulty.

Dr. Kellog sets out by remarking in reference to the modern theory of evolution, that the general acceptance of the view may be partly responsible for having turned some people aside from Christianity. "As everyone knows there are many who think that if once a theory of evolution be proved, then the hypothesis of a creator of the world is thereby shown to be a superfluity, as if the discovery of the *method* of the formation of the universe, or of anything, relieved us from the necessity of supposing an adequate sufficient cause". It is to be regretted that Dr. Kellog has merely made use of this profound remark to turn the flank of the scientific opponent set before his mind's eye for the moment, and has failed to see that it

answers his own entirely erroneous assertion that in Buddhism there is no God. Since the Buddhist perceives quite plainly that the attributes of the God of the universe can only be considered with a prospect of comprehending them from the point of view of the consciousness of Para-Nirvana, he does not perplex his lay-congregations by endeavouring to interpret them in terms of earthly language and thought. But no misrepresentations of Buddhistic theosophy can be more grotesque, no statement concerning it convey to ordinary minds an idea wider of the truth, than that Buddhism is a religion of Atheists who deny the existence of the Great First Cause, the supreme spiritual consciousness, the spirit which is the origin of all things, the fundamental reality of the cosmos. Dr. Kellog confidently assures his readers that the matter is not even in dispute with competent authorities.

"There is no God, is the central assumption of Buddhism. To this effect is the testimony of all the Buddhist books, etc....."To that effect *in the sense Dr. Kellog here intends*, he will not find one statement in any competent Buddhist authority. Wherever Buddha is represented as saying anything that modern readers construe as denying the existence of God, the significance of his language to all students of esoteric theosophy is unmistakably different. The meaning is that nowhere in nature will be found a finite entity in the nature of a glorified man who is recognisable as the creator of the infinite cosmos. Buddha is merely concerned to break down the degrading conception of an anthropomorphic deity, and with that very simple clue to follow there is no passage in any Buddhist book about God which presents any embarrassment to the reader or lends colour for a moment to the extravagant statement concerning the "initial assumption" of Buddhism which Dr. Kellog ventures to put forward. Whenever an English version of some Oriental text may furnish a disjointed sentence here and there that seems to correspond with this conception, we may be perfectly sure that a mistranslation has in [Page 23] some way disfigured the original sense. The fact simply is that in contemplating the world Buddhism fixes its attention on the *method* of which Dr. Kellog speaks in the passage about evolution already quoted — and says little or nothing about the cause behind that method which it conceives to be ineffable and indescribable. Other theological systems have skipped all reference to the method and have spoken only of the cause till their disciples, forgetting its remote grandeur, have invested it with the petty attributes of immediate vicinity. It is true, as Dr. Kellog says, that the recognition of the cause does not repudiate the method, but it is also true, as he does not say, that the recognition of the method does not repudiate the cause.

The two writers, whose book and article have been previously discussed, could hardly have fallen into the entanglement of misconceptions which their arguments exhibit, if the way had not been prepared for them by earlier critics of Buddhist doctrine. We have seen how strangely Dr. Rhys Davids mis-states that doctrine as it bears on the existence of the soul, in the course of his Hibbert lectures. The French writer on "The Religions of India", A. Barth, whose work has been published in an English translation, has been keen-sighted enough to perceive that the learned Pali scholar has failed to appreciate the spirit of the valuable translations we owe to his erudition. Mr. Barth sums up Dr. Rhys Davids' account of the Buddhist doctrine as follows: — "The Buddhist, strictly speaking, does not revive, but another, if I may say so, revives in his stead, and it is to avert from this other, who is to be only the heir of his Karman, the pains of existence, that he aspires to Nirvana. Such, at any rate, is the doctrine of the Pali books according to the opinion of scholars of the highest authority who have had the opportunity of studying it in the country itself". But Mr. Barth goes on: — "Has this doctrine been as explicitly formulated in the doctrine of the Master? We take leave to doubt this. On the one hand the Sanscrit books of the North appear to concede something permanent, an ego passing from one existence to another. On the other hand, we could hardly explain, it seems, how Buddhism, not contented with having annihilation accepted as the sovereign good, should have from the first rendered its task more difficult, still by in the end representing the pursuit of this good as a pure act of charity".

Unfortunately Mr. Barth, though repelled as it were from the *reductio ad absurdum* of the familiar mistake which Spence Hardy, Gogerly, Bigandet, and Rhys Davids, all fall into, prefers a half-way position for himself instead of driving to a logical conclusion the certainty he feels that no great religion could have been founded on the intolerable basis of such an error. He says after the passage just quoted:—"but in no way can this [Page 24] vaguely apprehended and feebly postulated ego be compared for instance with the simple and imperishable soul of the Sankhya philosophy". On what ground does he presume to say that it is vaguely apprehended and feebly postulated? Our translators have so far only dived into the mass of Buddhist sacred literature, bringing to the surface for the benefit of Western readers such fragments thereof as may have caught their fancy, and writings yet to be discovered may put this doctrine about the persistence of the Ego in plain terms instead of taking it for granted as is done in the text already available. But why will critics of Buddhism meanwhile overlook the important consideration which they recognise from time to time but then forget again — that Buddhism did not profess to reconstruct religious ideas from the beginning but to purify and expand them.

"The simple and imperishable soul" of the Sankhya philosophy is merely an item of Brahminical faith resting on the broad foundations of the Vedas, and all that is essential to Hindu thinking concerning God and man must be welded with the Buddhist interpretation of Nature in order that we may recover the point of view from which Buddha taught his disciples to regard these ideas. As Mr. Barth justly remarks, Buddhism was "a Hindu phenomenon, a natural product so to speak of the age and social circle that witnessed its birth", and in that "social circle" it does not strike Mr. Barth that there is any doubt about the survival of the soul, for he tells us in a matter of fact way that the pious Hindu "hopes to go to *Swarga*, which is the heaven of Indra, and of the gods in general". Going to such or such a place after you are dead seems a plain and intelligible process to the Western mind trained in the habits of thought which have assigned not only locality but physical attributes to the after states of humanity, but in truth if Buddhism refers to some of the complications connected with the destinies of the soul in a way which implies that all the possibilities of his progress are not summed up in the notion of "going to" this region or that, it is not necessarily denying any spiritual survival but merely discountenancing a grossly material view of spiritual life.

We have seen that in discussing the matter with the "householder" — the man who is content to live the ordinary life on earth and look forward to a normal hereafter — Buddha treats the theory that a good man will be born after death into some happy state "in heaven", as quite a matter of course. With this recognition to argue from, we need only combine the theory in question with the constantly reiterated Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, to arrive at an understanding quite independent of any disputable texts — as to *what must have been* the original Buddhist teachings concerning the progress of the soul. It is a mistake even when we have an apparently [Page 25] complete body of scriptures to deal with, to deduce the teachings of any given religion too slavishly from texts. It is doubly a mistake to do this in a case where we have to be content with a fragmentary and imperfect body of scriptures. The inevitable logical deductions from the leading tenets of a religion may safely be relied on as having formed part of its system of belief in the days of its original purity. Thus the truth manifestly is that the Buddhist view of the soul's destiny included the notion of immortality without accepting the attribute, at any stage of its progress, of immutability for the soul. The good man's Ego is *first* reborn in a happy state in heaven: but ultimately after its claims on spiritual happiness are satisfied, descends, again into earthly life. We need not indeed treat that view as Buddhist in any exclusive sense. It is the common property of most — probably I might say of all — Hindu forms of belief. The names given to various states of being may vary greatly among the various sects: different systems of symbology may be employed to embody the same underlying principles — or to embody them with subtle metaphysical differences to which European

thinkers do not, as a rule, attach much importance, but the idea that human soul evolution is accomplished by successive incarnations in bodily life, relieved by periodic baths of spiritual rest and peace, is much more widely diffused than Buddhism, as I have said, but is at all events essentially Buddhistic also. If anything in any Buddhist writing suggests to the Western reader the impression that the identity of the persistent Ego is "feebly postulated", that is merely due to the complexity of the idea (as compared to the elementary European conception of "going to" heaven or hell when you die) and not to its weakness or poverty. The whole mystery, for example, of individual identity through successive incarnations, unaccompanied by specific memory of mundane adventures or events, is wrapped up in the duplex character of the soul's survival, according to Buddhist faith, as adopted from the Hindu religion at large. Specific memory of the transitory interests associated with each physical life is necessarily exhausted in the intervening, period of spiritual experience. If anyone will look at the matter from the point of view of scientific modes of thought, he will see that this could not be otherwise, if we once recognise effects as produced by causes. The spiritual existence is necessarily subjective as to the force which penetrates it. The soul's intensity of feeling concerning the adventures or incidents, or emotions of its last physical life, is plainly the energy which on the higher planes of nature is translated (relatively) into spiritual life. As long as that energy continues in operation, the spiritual life continues as a consequence of it.

When a soul is ripe for reincarnation by the hypothesis it has ceased to care for the circumstances which vibrated through its last personality, in other words its last physical existence — the mask it last wore on earth [Page 26] has disintegrated altogether, and the pure Ego, untainted by specific recollections, but including within itself the same centre of consciousness that functioned in it from the beginning — returns to earth-life under the attraction of those affinities it has not yet conquered, or yet desired to conquer. This system of belief is coherent and intelligible and gives a clue to all that has been found embarrassing in Buddhist remarks about the "new-ness" of the "person" who is reborn in the progress of reincarnation. Also it disposes of the absurd notion that an immense religion that has been devoutly accepted as a rule of life by almost countless millions, has been carried on without any hypothesis of a heaven for good souls to "go to". They go to heaven — by the Buddhist theory — for as long as they have earned the right to be there; *or* since heaven in the sense of personal bliss, though it may be prolonged, is necessarily by Oriental logic a state which comes sooner or later to an end, there is another alternative to be considered. On the one side lies reasonable indulgence, so far as that may be compatible with virtue, in the joys of life plus spiritual enjoyment in heaven, and a return eventually to the chequered conditions of incarnation; on the other a stern self-denial in regard to physical existence, an utter withdrawal from all thought of finding enjoyment in any of its transitory conditions, a passionate concentration during life on the idea of holiness in its most absolute purity — and then a heaven of a higher kind, the very character of which it is hard for the embodied understanding to grasp, which does not come to an end; *or* rather, for Oriental thought never permits the idea of immutability, which does not come to an end within any period covered by the whole series of incarnations and passages through heaven contemplated by the alternative programme.

Modern European commentators on Buddhism would have been guarded from many misconceptions if they had realised the theory of future life with its varied possibilities, as thus arising from the contact of the Buddhist ascetic's enthusiasm for Nirvana with the prevalent systems of Hindu thought about the *normal* future life. When the theory just roughly sketched — which shows us that normal future as consisting partly of spiritual periods, and partly of the returns to earthly incarnations, was described with some amplitude of detail in my own book on "*Esoteric Buddhism*", some Hindu critics objected to ideas, thus the common property of all Hindu religions, being specially labeled with the title of Buddhism. And

yet for want of a little contact in this way with the living faith of Hindus in the present day, which would have cast so instructive a light upon their ancient writings, learned students have found some of the simplest problems of Buddhist texts hopelessly insoluble, and have speculated one in the track of another through a weary cycle of literature [Page 27] as to the meaning of apparent contradictions in Buddhist texts which would never have given any trouble to an enquirer imbued with the spirit of Oriental thought.

Let us consider for example a passage from one of Professor Max Müller's early writings on Buddhism — to be compared directly with his later comments. In his article on "Buddha and the Buddhist Pilgrims", published in 1857, he writes: — "This doctrine of salvation has been called Atheism and Nihilism, and it no doubt was liable to both charges in its metaphysical character, and in that form in which we chiefly know it. It was atheistic, not because it denied the existence of such gods as Indra and Brahma. Buddha did not even condescend to deny their existence. But it was atheistic like the Sankhya philosophy which admitted but one subjective self, and considered creation as an illusion of that self, imagining itself for a while in the mirror of nature. As there was no reality in creation there could be no real Creator. All that seemed to exist was the result of ignorance. To remove that ignorance was to remove the cause of all that seemed to exist. How a religion which taught the annihilation of all existence, of all thought, of all individuality and personality as the highest object of all endeavours, could have laid hold of the minds of millions of human beings, and how, at the same time, by enforcing the duties of morality, justice, kindness and self-sacrifice it could have exercised a decided beneficial influence not only on the natives of India, but on the lowest barbarians of Central Asia, is one of the riddles which no philosophy has ever been able to solve. The morality which it teaches is not a morality of expediency and rewards. Virtue is not enjoined because it necessarily leads to happiness. No! virtue is to be practised, but happiness is to be shunned, and the only reward for virtue is that it subdues the passions and thus prepares the human mind for that knowledge which is to end in complete annihilation".

Whether we rely on the perfect coherence of Buddhism with the Indian doctrines it took over *en bloc*, or on the translated texts, such as that already quoted in Buddha's address to the householders, it is transparently plain that the learned Professor is mistaken all through this passage. There is no riddle in the matter. Buddhist teaching is quite as ready to recognise a system of future rewards and punishments as inevitably following on conduct in this life, as Christianity or Mahomedanism itself. All that is treated by Buddha as a matter of course, and if he had had nothing more to say than that, he would never have been moved with the necessity of doing all he did to teach the world. His system of thought was superadded to the elementary idea of all religions that, in a future (relatively) spiritual state, the soul will obtain the fruit of its Karma — the reward or punishment due to its merit or demerit. It was superadded to the other idea, by no [Page 28] means elementary, but perfectly familiar to all the people he had to deal with, *viz.*, that besides reaping the fruits of its Karma in the subjective state of heavenly rest, the soul would complete the harvest in the next stage of physical life, and the great point he had to emphasise was this: that for humanity there was a path that would enable it to achieve a higher evolution than that which merely led through alternate states of heavenly bliss and physical existence (with all its drawbacks). There was a means of escape from the law which drew souls back into incarnation; a way of getting rid, once for all, of the sorrows incidental to fleshly existence. That way led through the extinction of *Karma*, which clothed the soul with the affinities drawing it back into re-incarnation, up to the supreme condition of holiness called Nirvana, in which the selfishness, the egotism, the delusive sense of separateness which kept down humanity to the conventional level would be "blown out". Not that the higher spiritual consciousness would disappear, but the appetite for separate physical existence would disappear in the sublime glories of that spiritual consciousness fully awakened at last.

It is a strange destiny for such a doctrine to have been drowned in the ludicrously misdirected criticism of the Western scholars, who have taken an interest in Buddhism since the era of what may be called its re-discovery in modern times by Mr. Brian Hodgson. But the mistake once fairly set on foot has been tossed from writer to writer. Mr. Spence Hardy ventures to sum the matter up as follows: — "From the absence of a superior motive to obedience, Buddhism becomes a system of selfishness. The principle set forth in the vicarious endurances of the Bodhisat is forgotten. It is the vast scheme of profits and losses reduced to regular order. The acquirement of merit by the Buddhist is as mercenary an act as the toils of the merchant to secure the possession of wealth. The disciple of Buddha is not taught to abhor crime because of its exceeding sinfulness, but because its commission will be to him a personal injury. There is no moral pollution in sin; it is merely a calamity to be deprecated or a misfortune to be shunned. . . . The Buddhist can discover no permanent rest, no eternity of peace in any world, and he therefore concludes that there can be no deliverance from change and sorrow but by the cessation from existence".

It is simply confusion of thought in the critic's mind which leads him to suppose the Buddhist doctrine falling short of that which it really goes beyond. Not merely by Buddhism, but by all the severely metaphysical codes of Oriental belief immutability of consciousness in eternity is put aside as unthinkable. But phrases merely repudiating that intellectual error are — by persons who do not stop to discover the nature of the error — taken as repudiating the survival of the soul after death. The Buddhist is really taking for granted, as a matter of course, the survival through millions of ages! If he had only realised this, if he had only stopped to [Page 29] think the matter out, surely Professor Max Müller could never have launched himself on that unfortunate interpretation of the Buddhist creed which led him on from one grievous misconception to another.

In the article just quoted he goes on: — "And what was the object of all this asceticism ? Simply to guide each individual towards that path which would finally bring him to Nirvana, to utter extinction or annihilation".

And in reference to the stages of meditation preceding Buddha's death, he says:—" We must soar still higher, and though we may feel giddy and disgusted, we must sit out the tragedy until the curtain falls. After the four stages of meditation are passed, the Buddha (and every being is to become a Buddha) enters into the infinity of space; then into the infinity of intelligence; and thence he passes into the region of nothing. But even there there is no rest. There is still something left — the idea of the nothing in which he rejoices. That also must be destroyed, and it is destroyed in the fourth and last region, where there is not even the idea of a nothing left, and where there is complete rest undisturbed by nothing or what is not nothing. Such religion we should say was made for a madhouse".

It was made instead for a nation of metaphysicians. No attempt to represent in language the passage of an individual consciousness through such exalted spiritual states as may lead at last to freedom of all desire for separate existence — a *maya* or delusion of the physical plane — could be productive of a view of things likely to be found comfortable by intense thinkers in a keenly materialistic age. But to attribute an atheist and nihilistic character, whence materialism in the extreme degree, to a system of thought so highly spiritual as to fly over the heads of its accusers, is to illustrate in a curious fashion the epigrammatic theory that extremes meet.

In a letter to the *Times*, dated April 24th, 1857, Professor Max Müller combats a criticism on his view of

Nirvana put forward by Mr. Francis Barham, and refers to his own effort in the articles on the Buddhist pilgrims to show that Nirvana meant "utter annihilation". He says, "Every Sanscrit scholar knows that Nirvana means blowing out and not absorption. . . . It is doubtful whether the term Nirvana was coined by Buddha. . . . It is explained in the 'Amara Kosha' as having the meaning of 'blowing out applied to a fire and to a sage'. . . . the only ground on which we may stand if we wish to defend the founder of Buddhism against the charges of nihilism and atheism is this — that as some of the Buddhists admit, one of the Baskets was rather the work of his pupils, and not of Buddha himself. This distinction between the authentic words of Buddha and the canonical books in general is mentioned more than once. . . . Buddha himself, though perhaps not a nihilist, was [Page 30] certainly an atheist. He does not deny distinctly either the existence of gods, or that of God; but he ignores the former, and he is ignorant of the latter. Therefore if Nirvana in his mind was not yet complete annihilation, still less could it have been absorption into a divine essence. It was nothing but selfishness in the metaphysical sense of the word — a relapse into that being which is nothing but itself. . . . At the present moment the great majority of Buddhists would be probably quite incapable of understanding the abstract nonsense of their ancient masters. The view taken of Nirvana in China, Mongolia and Tartary may probably be as gross as that which most of the Mahomedans form of their paradise. But in the history of religion, the historian must go back to the earliest and most original documents that are to be obtained. Thus only may he hope to understand the later developments which, whether for good or evil, every form of faith has had to undergo".

In view of all that has gone before, there is no need to take every such passage as this to pieces and repeat the explanations which cover all the ground. But it is interesting to group a few such passages together in order to show how the same two or three mistakes are responsible for the tone of savage depreciation in which so many of its critics in Europe have dealt with the Buddhist faith, the beautiful spirituality of which they have thus altogether missed.

In the article on Buddhism in his "Chips from a German Workshop" — this paper bearing date 1862, Max Müller adheres to the view already expressed of Nirvana. He says: "Difficult as it seems to us to conceive it, Buddha admits no real cause of this unreal world. He denies the existence not only of a creator, but of any absolute being. According to the metaphysical tenets, if not to Buddha himself, at least of his sect, there is no reality anywhere, neither in the past nor in the future. True wisdom consists in perceiving the nothingness of all things, and in desire to become nothing, to be blown out, to enter into Nirvana. Emancipation is obtained by total extinction, not by absorption in Brahman, or by the recovery of the soul's true estate. If to be is misery, not to be must be felicity, and this felicity is the highest reward which Buddha promised to his disciples".

It is quite possible that the reward he promised them would be no reward at all, for a great many highly-gifted and intellectual men immersed in modern civilisation. Great advancement along some lines of progress is occasionally purchased by a retardation of progress along other lines. But whether the almost appalling holiness and forgetfulness of self involved in the idea of Nirvana is attractive to us or not, we need not commit the mistake of supposing — as in the other case — that it falls short of that which it over-shoots. Whatever was the nature of the felicity that Buddha [Page 31] offered to those of his disciples inclined to tread "the Path" with him, it was something they were assumed to prefer on the face of things to immeasurable periods of selfish heavenly bliss interspersed with the intense existence of physical life. If Buddha had said:—There is nothing to be got anyhow after death but a condition in which consciousness of self as a separate entity disappears; then his modern critics might have had reason in arguing — from the point of view of their own aspirations — that this was a gloomy and comfortless

creed. But as his address to the householders, and the fact that his system was built upon existing beliefs, among other plain evidences will show, he really saw in effect: — there is something better to strive for than the heaven which awaits all good men. There is utter holiness, which is the absorption of consciousness in the Supreme Consciousness, the surrender of the sense of separateness. Let those who like the keen sense of separate existence be good, and they will be happy. Let those who can understand spiritual exaltation follow me. The world at large around him in Buddha's day — as is clear from the fact that they believed in him and took him as their Lord, whether they tried to imitate his life or merely admired it and consoled themselves with the lower hope of earning reward — understood him fully.

Attention may here be given for a moment to a suggestive passage concerning the nature of the union with Brahma, to which Buddhism aspires, to be found in a conversation between Buddha and Vasettha (*vide* Dr. Rhys Davids' Hibbert Lectures) as to which is the right path of holiness. By circuitous questioning the teacher brings out the idea that it is nonsense to imagine men still ardent in their attachment to worldly possessions and liable to anger and passions, can after death find a concord and likeness between themselves and Brahma — Brahma being free from anger and malice, sinless, and having self-mastery. The cultivation of similar qualities in himself is the true path of holiness for every man when he treads it: — "Uprightness is his delight, and he sees danger in the least of those things he should avoid, he adopts and trains himself in the precepts, 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..... Then in sooth, Vasettha; that such a man — who is kind and full of love, and pure in mind and master of himself — that he, after death, when the body is dissolved, should become united with Brahma — such a condition of things is every way possible." (" Hibbert Lectures ", p. 69.)

A couple of passages from Mr. Spence Hardy's "Manual of Buddhism will warn the reader from going to that source for enlightenment concerning the real doctrines of Buddha". In the Brahma Jata Sutra (Rev. D. J. Gogerly) "we have an account of sixty-two heterodox sects". These include [Page 32] persons who suppose — almost any specific hypothesis that can be imagined about a future life. Buddha declares them all erroneous, so that according to him there is no state of future existence, either conscious or unconscious, material or immaterial, miserable or happy, and yet death is not annihilation. We exist and we do not exist, we die and we do not die. These appear to be contradictions, but we shall afterwards learn that the seeming discrepancy arises from the complexity of the system. There will be a future state, but not of the individuality that now exists, and though death is the dissolution of that which now exists, it is not the annihilation of a potentiality inherent in that existence".

To Mr. Hardy this is all bewildering nonsense, and yet its easy paradoxes will surely be plain in their meaning to anyone who will look at them in the light of the considerations advanced in these pages.