

THE PENITENT THIEF:

EXHIBITING BUDDHA'S DOCTRINE OF THE NEW BIRTH AND
THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

Now first translated from the Pâli by ALBERT J. EDMUNDS.¹

Middling Collection, Dialogue No. 86.

Luke xxiii. 39-43.—And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

John iii. 5.—Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Mark ii. 5.—And Jesus seeing their faith saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven.

Cf. also Eusebius H. E. iii. 23 (the story of the Apostle John pursuing and converting the robber).

Thus have I heard. At one season the Blessed One was staying at Sâvatthi, in the Conqueror's Grove, the cloister-garden of the Feeder of the Poor. And at that season there was a robber named Finger-garland (Angulimâlo) in the realm of Pasenadi, the

¹ There is a corrupt version of this story in Spence Hardy, translated from mediæval Ceylon sources, but the present is its first translation from the Pâli. Its antiquity is attested by the Pâli Great Chronicle, which tells us that it was sculptured, together with other leading stories from Buddha's life, upon the great Tope at the capital of Ceylon, in the second century B. C. The sculptures of similar scenes at Bharhut and Sânci forbid our rejecting the Chronicle's list of Ceylon sculptures as fiction. [Owing to lack of time, the proofs of the present article have not been read by the author.—*Ed.*]

King of Kosalâ; and he was barbarous, red-handed, devoted to killing and slaughter, unmerciful to all who live. By him towns, villages, and districts were made as though they had never been. He slew men all the time, and wore a garland of their fingers.

Now the Blessed One, having dressed betimes, took his bowl in his robe, and went to Sâvatthi for alms. When he had gone round it, and had returned from the quest of alms in the afternoon, he rolled up his mat, took his bowl in his robe, and entered upon the high road where Finger-garland the robber was. Then the herdsmen, cattle-tenders, and farmers, who were working, saw the Blessed One going thither, and called to him: "O philosopher! Go not upon that road; for a robber named Finger-garland is thereon, who is barbarous, red-handed, devoted to killing and slaughter, unmerciful to all who live. By him towns, villages, and districts are made as though they had never been. He slays men all the time and wears a garland of their fingers. O philosopher, men go upon this road only in companies of ten, twenty, thirty, or forty; and they go armed for fear of Finger-garland the robber."

When they had said this, the Blessed One went on his way in silence. And a second and a third time they said so, but still the Blessed One went on his way in silence.

Now Finger-garland the robber saw the Blessed One coming from afar, and seeing him he thought to himself: "This is wonderful, this is marvellous: men go upon this road only in companies of ten, twenty, thirty, or forty, and they go armed for fear of me; but this philosopher, it seems, is alone, without any one, open to attack. What if I now take the life of this philosopher?" Then Finger-garland the robber took his sword and shield, got bow and quiver ready, and walked behind the Blessed One. But the Blessed One put forth such an effort of psychical power that Finger-garland the robber, going with all his might, could not overtake the Blessed One going by his inner force (*pakati*). So the robber thought to himself: "This is wonderful, this is marvellous: hitherto I have chased and caught an elephant running, a horse, a chariot, or a deer; but now, going with all my might, I cannot overtake this philosopher going by his inner force." He stood and said to the Blessed One: "Philosopher, stand! Philosopher, stand!"

"I am standing, O Finger-garland; stand thou also!"

Then Finger-garland the robber thought to himself: "These Sâkya philosophers tell the truth and keep their promises. And yet this philosopher, even while he is going, says, 'I am standing, O Finger-garland; stand thou also!' What if I now ask him [what

he means]?” Then the robber addressed the Blessed One with a stanza :

“Philosopher, thou sayest, ‘I am standing,’ while thou art going, and thou callest me standing when thou art not so ;

“I ask thee, philosopher, this question : How art thou standing when I am not standing?”

“I am standing, O Finger-garland, always among all beings, having laid aside the staff ;

“But thou art unrestrained among living things : therefore I am standing, and thou art not.”

“Long has the great Seer (*Isi*),¹ this philosopher debating in the great Wood, been revered by me ;

“I myself will renounce evil for long, having heard thy stanza that is linked with religion.

“Even thus does a robber resemble² a sword or a weapon at the pit and precipice of hell.”

The robber bowed at the feet of the Auspicious One, and begged of him ordination on the spot.

Then Buddha, the compassionate Seer, he who is master of the world with its angels,

Said to him : “Come, O monk ;” and this was all there was to make him a monk.

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Now the Blessed One, with Finger-garland for an attendant philosopher, went on his journey towards Sâvatthi and in due time arrived there ; and there the Blessed One stayed at Sâvatthi, in the Conqueror's Grove, the cloister garden of the Feeder of the Poor. Now at that season a great crowd collected at the palace-gate of Pasenadi, the King of Kosalâ, and there went up a hue and cry : “Your Majesty, there is a robber in your realm named Finger-garland, who is barbarous, red-handed, devoted to killing and slaughter, unmerciful to all who live. By him towns, villages, and districts are made as though they had never been. He slays men all the time, and wears a garland of their fingers. Let your Majesty arrest him.”

Now Pasenadi, the King of Kosalâ, departed that day from Sâvatthi with some five hundred horses and proceeded to the cloister-garden. He went by chariot as far as the ground was passable for chariots, and then alighted, and went on foot to where the Blessed One was. Going up to the Blessed One, he saluted him and sat

respectfully on one side. While he so sat, the Blessed One said to him: "O great King, is Seniyo Bimbisâro, the King of Magadhâ, provoked at you, or the Licchavi [clan] of Vesâli, or other rival Kings?"

"Nay, Lord: none of these Kings are provoked at me. But, Lord, there is in my realm a robber named Finger-garland, who is barbarous, red-handed, devoted to killing and slaughter, unmerciful to all who live. By him towns, villages, and districts are made as though they had never been. He slays men all the time and wears a garland of their fingers. Lord, I fear I shall not arrest him."

"But, great King, if you saw Finger-garland with his hair and beard cut off, having put on the yellow robes and gone forth from domestic life into the homeless one; abstaining from taking life, from theft, and from lying; eating one meal a day, chaste, moral, with a glorious religion,—what would you do to him?"

"Lord, we should salute him respectfully, or rise in his presence, or offer him a seat, or present him with robe and alms-bowl, a lodging-place, the requisites for sickness, medicine and conveniences; and we should appoint for him the protection, toleration, and defence that are due to religion.¹ But, Lord, how could there be such moral restraint in an immoral, wicked man like him?"

Now at that time the venerable Finger-garland was sitting not far from the Blessed One. Then the Blessed One, stretching out his right arm, said to Pasenadi, the King of Kosalâ: "This, great King, is Finger-garland!"

Then the King was seized with fear, consternation, and horror, and the Blessed One, seeing him afraid and agitated with horror, said to him: "Fear not, great King, fear not; there is nothing for you to fear any more." So the King, who had been terrified, became calm again, and went up to Finger-garland, saying to him: "Surely your Reverence is not Finger-garland?"

"Yes, great King."

"What is the clan of your Reverence's father, and what is the clan of your mother?"

"Great King, my father is a Gaggo, and my mother a Mantânî."

"May it please your Reverence Gaggo-Mantânî-son, I shall supply you with robe and alms-bowl, with a mat to sit and sleep

¹Rhys Davids translates the same phrase in the *Long Collection* thus: "watch and ward and guard, according to the law." The "or" in our present translation of this paragraph arises from a difference in the text.

on, and with the requisites for sickness, medicine and conveniences."

But at that season the venerable Finger-garland was a forest-dweller, with an alms-bowl, and wearing three robes taken from dust-heaps. So he said to the King: "Enough, great King: three robes are my full outfit."

Then Pasenadi, the King of Kosalâ, approached the Blessed One, saluted him respectfully, and sat on one side. And so sitting, the King said to the Blessed One: "Wonderful, O Lord! Marvellous, O Lord! is it even until now, O Lord Blessed One: men are tamed among the untamed, pacified among the unpacified, and among those who have not attained, they are brought to Nirvâna (literally, extinguished among the non-extinct). He, Lord, whom we could not tame by staff or sword, is tamed by the Blessed One without staff and without sword. But now, Lord, we must go: we have much to do, much business on hand."

"Just as you think fit, great King."

So Pasenadi, the King of Kosalâ, rose from his seat, saluted the Blessed One respectfully, and keeping him on his right hand, departed.

Then the venerable Finger-garland, having dressed betimes, took bowl in robe and went into Sâvatthi for alms. And going through Sâvatthi from house to house for alms, he saw a woman in the agonies of travail, and thereupon thought to himself: "Alas, how beings suffer; alas, how beings suffer!"

Now the venerable Finger-garland, having gone to Sâvatthi for alms and returned in the afternoon, approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat as usual, and said: "Lord, to-day on my begging rounds in Sâvatthi, while I went from house to house, I saw a woman in the agonies of travail; whereupon I thought to myself: 'Alas, how beings suffer; alas, how beings suffer!'"

"Well now, Finger-garland, go to Sâvatthi, go up to that woman and say this: 'Since I was born, sister, I do not remember that I ever purposely took the life of anything that breathes. By this truth be there safety to thee and safety to thy womb.'"

"But, Lord, that would surely be for me a deliberate lie: by me, Lord, have many breathing things been reft of life."

"Well, then, Finger-garland, go to Sâvatthi, approach that woman and say: 'Sister, since I was BORN OF THE NOBLE BIRTH I do not remember that I ever purposely took the life of aught that breathes. By this truth be there safety to thee and safety to thy womb.'"

“Even so, Lord,” said the venerable Finger-garland, in assent unto the Blessed One; and going into Sâvatthi, he approached that woman and said: ‘Sister, since I was BORN OF THE NOBLE BIRTH I do not remember that I ever purposely took the life of aught that breathes. By this truth be there safety unto thee and safety to thy womb.’”

Whereupon there was safety unto that woman, and safety to her womb. And forthwith the venerable Finger-garland, dwelling alone, retired, earnest, ardent, and strenuous, for a little time, realised by his own supernal Knowledge, and even in this world, that incomparable goal of the religious life, for the sake whereof do veritable gentlemen go forth from the domestic life into the homeless one: he perceived that birth was destroyed, the religious life was lived, and duty done, and for this existence there was naught beyond. And so the venerable Finger-garland became one of the Arahats.

Now the venerable Finger-garland, having dressed betimes, took bowl in robe, and went to Sâvatthi for alms; and on one occasion a clod of earth was thrown and hit his person; upon another occasion a stick, and yet again a stone. Then the venerable Finger-garland, with his head broken and the blood flowing, his bowl broken and his robe rent, approached the Blessed One. And the Blessed One saw him coming from afar, and said to him: “Bear up, O Brâhman, bear up! *You are feeling in this world the effect of some deed for which you would have been tormented in hell for many years, for many hundreds and thousands of years.*”

Then the venerable Finger-garland, when secluded and solitary, felt the bliss of deliverance, and on that occasion gave vent to the following Udâna:

[The Dialogue ends with a page of verse. The words italicised are important. This is the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. To the Arahats all the past is wiped away, and he only suffers such physical effects of evil as those described; but no retribution can follow him beyond the grave.]