

AMITABHA.

A STORY OF BUDDHIST METAPHYSICS.

BY THE EDITOR.

[CONTINUED.]

THE CONFESSION.

THE young novice spent his days in study and his nights in doubt. He followed with interest the recitations of his instructor on the philosophy of the Enlightened One; he enjoyed the birth-stories of Bodhisattva and the parables of the master with their moral applications, but when he retired in the evening or was otherwise left to his own thoughts he began to ponder on the uselessness of the hermit's life and longed to return to the world with its temptations and struggles, its victories and defeats, its pleasures and pains, its hopes and fears. He enjoyed the solitude of the forest, but he began to think that the restlessness of the world could offer him more peace of mind than the inactivity of a monkish life.

When Charaka had familiarised himself with all the Sutras and wise sayings which were known to the brethren of the monastery, the time began to hang heavy on his hands, and he felt that the religious discourses were becoming tedious.

Weeks elapsed, and Charaka despaired of either becoming accustomed to monkish life or of understanding the deeper meaning of their renunciation of the world, and his conscience began to trouble him; for the more the elder brethren respected him for his knowledge and gentleness, and the more they praised him, the less worthy he deemed himself of their recognition.

The day of confession¹ approached again. He had spent the hours in fasting and self-discipline, but all this availed nothing. He was weary and felt a sadness of heart beyond description.

¹In Pāli, Uposatha.

In the evening all the brethren were gathered together in the chaitya, the large hall where they held their devotional meetings. The aisles lay in mystic darkness, and the pictures on the heavy columns and on the ceiling were half concealed. They appeared and disappeared from time to time in the flicker of the torches that were employed to light the room. The monks sat in silent expectation, their faces showing a quietude and calmness which proved that they were unconcerned about their own fate, ready to live or to die, as their doom might be, only bent on the one aim of reaching Nirvâna.

The senior monk arose and addressed the assembly. "Reverend sirs," he said, "let the order hear me. To-day is full moon, and the day of the unburdening of our hearts. If the order is ready, let the order consecrate this day to the recital of the confession. This is our first duty, and so let us listen to the declaration of purity."

The brethren responded, saying: "We are here to listen and will consider the questions punctiliously."

The speaker continued: "Whoever has committed a transgression, let him speak, those who are free from the consciousness of guilt, let them be silent."

At this moment a tall figure rose slowly and hesitatingly from the ground at the further end of the hall. He did not speak but stood there quietly, towering for some time in the dusky recess between two pillars as though he were the apparition of a guilty conscience. The presiding brother at last broke the silence and addressed the brethren, saying: "A monk who has committed a fault, and remembers it, if he endeavors to be pure, should confess his fault. When a fault is confessed, it will lie lightly on him."

Still the shadowy figure stood motionless, which seemed to increase the gloom in the hall.

"One of the brethren has risen, indicating thereby that he desires to speak," continued the abbot. "A monk who does not confess a fault after the question has been put three times is guilty of an intentional lie, and the Blessed One teaches that an intentional lie cuts a man off from sanctification."

The gloomy figure now lifted his head and with suppressed emotion began to speak. "Venerable father," he said, "and ye reverend sirs, may I speak out and unburden my heart?" The voice was that of the novice, and a slight commotion passed through the assemblage. Having been encouraged to speak freely and without reserve, Charaka began :

“Venerable father, and ye reverend sirs: I feel guilty of having infringed on one of the great prohibitions. I am as a palm tree, the top of which has been destroyed. I am broken in spirit and full of contrition. I am anxious to be a disciple of the Shakya-Muni, but I am not worthy to be a monk, I never have been and never shall be.” Here his voice faltered, and he sobbed like a child.

The brethren were horror-stricken; they thought at once that the youth was contaminated by some secret crime; he was too young to be free from passion, too beautiful to be beyond temptation, too quick-witted not to be ambitious. True, they loved him, but they felt now that their very affection for him was a danger, and there was no one in the assembly who did not feel the youth's self-accusation as partly directed against himself. But the abbot overcame the sentiment that arose so quickly, and encouraged the penitent brother to make a full confession. “Do not despair,” he said, “thou art young; it is natural that thy heart should still cherish dreams of love, and that alluring reminiscences should still haunt thy mind.”

“I entered the brotherhood with false hopes and wrong aspirations,” replied the novice. “I am longing for wisdom and supernatural powers; I am ambitious to do and to dare, and I hoped to acquire a deeper knowledge through self-discipline and holiness. I am free from any actual transgression, but my holiness is mockery; my piety is not genuine; I am a hypocrite and I find that I am betraying you, venerable father, and all the monks of this venerable community. But it grieveth me most that I am false to myself; I am not worthy to wear the yellow robe.”

“Thou art not expected to be perfect,” replied the abbot, “thou art walking on the path, and hast not as yet reached the goal. Thy fault is impatience with thyself and not hypocrisy.”

“Do not palliate my fault, venerable father,” said Charaka. “There is something wrong in my heart and in my mind. If I am not a hypocrite, then I am a heretic; and a heretic walks on the wrong road in a wrong direction, and can never reach the goal. Do not minimise, do not extenuate, do not qualify and mitigate my faults, for I feel their grievousness and am anxious to be led out of the darkness into the light. I long for life and the unfoldment of life. I want to comprehend the deepest truths; I want to know and to taste the highest bliss; I want to accomplish the greatest deeds.”

“Then thou art worldly; thou longest for power, for fame, for

honor, for pleasures," suggested the abbot inquiringly; "thou art not yet free from the illusion of selfhood. It is not the truth, then, that thou wantest, but thyself, to be an owner of the truth; it is self-enhancement, not service; vanity, not helpfulness."

"That may be, reverend father," replied the novice; "thy wisdom shall judge me; though I do not feel myself burdened by selfishness. No, I do not love myself. I would gladly sacrifice myself for any noble cause, for truth, for justice, for procuring bliss for others. Nor do I crave worldly pleasures, but I do not feel any need of shirking them. Pleasures like pains are the stuff that life is made of, and I do not hate life. I enjoy the unfoldment of life with all its aspirations, not for my sake, but for life's sake. I do not love myself, I love God. That is my fault, and that is the root from which grow all my errors, heresies, hypocrisies, and the false position in which I now am."

The good abbot did not know what to say. He looked at the poor novice and pitied him for his pangs of conscience. Every one present felt that the man suffered, that there was something wrong with him; but no one could exactly say what it was. His ambition was not sinful but noble. And that he loved God was certainly not a crime. At last the abbot addressed Subhûti, Charaka's senior and teacher, and asked him: "Have you, reverend brother, noticed in this novice's behavior or views anything strange or exceptional?"

Subhûti replied that he had not.

The abbot continued to inquire about Charaka's previous religious relations and the significance of his love of God.

"I do not know, reverend sir," was the elder monk's answer. "He is not a Brahman, but a descendant of a noble family of the northern conquerors that came to India and founded the kingdom of Gandhâra. Yet he knows Brahman writings and is familiar with the philosophy of the Yavanas¹ of the distant West. I discoursed with him and understand that by God he means all that is right and good and true in the world and without whom there can be no enlightenment."

"Very well," proclaimed the abbot, "there is no sin in loving God, for what you describe as God is our Lord Shakyamuni, the Enlightened One, the Buddha, the Tathâgata;" but he added not without a suggestion of reproof: "You might dignify the Lord Buddha with a higher title than God. Gods, if they exist, are not Buddha's equals. When Bodhisattva was a child, the gods pros-

¹ The Greeks.

trated themselves before him, for they recognised the Tathâgata's superiority even before he had attained to complete Buddhahood. The divinity of the gods is less than the noble life of a Bodhi-sattva."

Having thus discussed the case of the novice Charaka, the abbot addressed himself to the Brotherhood, asking the reverend sirs what they would deem right in the present case. Was the brother at all guilty of the fault of which he accused himself and if so what should he do to restore his good standing and set himself aright in the Brotherhood?

Then Subhûti arose and said: "Charaka is a man of deep comprehension and of an earnest temper. The difficulty which he encounters is not for us to judge him on or to advise him about. But there is a philosopher living in the kingdom of Magadha, by the name of Açvaghosha. If there is anyone in the world that can set an erring brother right, it is Açvaghosha, whose wisdom is so great that since Buddha entered Nirvâna there has been no man on earth who might have surpassed him either in knowledge or judgment." So Subhûti proposed to write a letter of introduction to Açvaghosha commending the brother Charaka to his care and suggesting to him to dispel his doubts and to establish him again firmly in the faith in which the truth shines forth more brilliantly than in any other religion.

The abbot agreed with Subhûti and the general opinion among the brethren was in favor of sending Charaka to the kingdom of Magadha to the philosopher Açvaghosha to have his doubts dispelled and his heart established again in the faith of the Buddha, the Blessed One, the teacher of truth.

Before they could carry out their plan the session was interrupted by a messenger from the royal court of Gandhâra, who inquired for a novice by the name of Charaka,—a man well versed in medicine and other learned arts. A dreadful epidemic had spread in the country, and the old king had died while two of his sons were afflicted with the disease and now lay at the point of death. The oldest son and heir to the throne was in the field defending his country against the Parthians, and some mountaineers of the East, nominally subject to the kingdom of Magadha but practically independent, had utilised the opportunity afforded by these circumstances to descend into the fertile valleys of Gandhâra and to pillage the country.

The regard in which Charaka had been held in the Brotherhood during his novitiate had not suffered through his confession

and was even heightened. It had been known in the cloister that the young novice was of a noble family, but he had made nothing of it and so the intimate connection with the royal family of the country created an uncommon sensation among his venerable brethren. Now, a special awe attached to his person since it was known that the young king knew of Charaka, and needing his wisdom, sent a special messenger to call him back to the capital.

In spite of the interruption the ceremony of confession was continued and closed in the traditional way; all the questions regarding transgressions that might have been committed were asked and in some cases sins were punctiliously reported by those who felt a need of unburdening their conscience. Penances were imposed which were willingly and submissively assumed. When everything had been attended to, the abbot turned again to Charaka saying, "If you had concealed your secret longings, you would have been guilty of hypocrisy, but now since you have openly laid bare the state of your mind, there is no longer any falsehood in you. Therefore I find no fault with your conduct; should you find that you cannot remain a monk, you must know that there is no law that obliges you to remain in the Brotherhood against your will."

The abbot then granted Charaka permission to obey the King's call, saying, "You are free to leave the order in peace and goodwill, but I enjoin you to make a vow that you will not leave your doubts unsettled, but that as soon as you have attended to the pressing duties which will engage your attention at the capital you will make a pilgrimage to the philosopher Açvaghosha, who lives in the kingdom of Magadha. He will be a better adviser than I, and he shall decide whether or not you are fit to be a monk of our Lord the Buddha."

GANDHARA.

As the night was far advanced, the royal messenger allowed his horses a short rest in the Vihâra, and set out with Charaka at an early hour the following morning. The two travellers could not, however, make rapid progress, for the atmosphere was murky, and the fogs of the rainy season obscured the way. They passed a picket of Gandhâra soldiers who were on the lookout for the hostile mountaineers. The mounted messenger showed them his passport, and the two men reached the capital only when the shades of evening were settling upon the valley. The gates were carefully guarded by armed men. The sentinel led the two horsemen to the

officer at the gate, who seemed satisfied with the report that Charaka had nowhere encountered enemies; but the home news was very bad, for one of the princes had died and Chandana (commonly called Kanishka), the third and youngest son of the king, was thought to be critically ill.

The night was darker than usual, and the town made a gloomy impression. The inhabitants were restless and seemed to be prepared for a dire calamity.

Charaka was at once conducted to the royal palace. He passed through a line of long streets which seemed narrow and dismal. The people whom they met on their way, being wrapped in a veil of mist, resembled even at a short distance dim dusky specters, like guilty ghosts condemned for some crime to haunt the scene of their former lives. At last they reached the palace, and Charaka was ushered into the dimly-lighted bedroom of prince Kanishka. Charaka stood motionless and watched the heavy breathing of the patient. He then put his hand gently upon the feverish forehead and in a low voice demanded water to cool the burning temples of the sick man. Turning to the attendants, he met the questioning eye of a tall and beautiful woman, an almost imperious figure. He knew her well; it was princess Kamalavatî, the king's daughter and a younger half-sister of the prince.

"His condition is very bad," whispered Charaka in reply to the unuttered question that was written in her face, "but not yet hopeless. Where are the nurses who assist you in ministering unto the patient?"

Two female attendants appeared, and the physician withdrew with them into an adjoining room where he listened to their reports. "The king and his second son have died of the same disease, and the situation is very critical," said Charaka; "but we may avoid the mistakes made in the former cases and adjust the diet strictly to the condition of the patient."

Charaka and Kanishka were of the same age. They had for some time been educated together and were intimate friends. But when the prince joined the royal army, Charaka studied the sciences under the direction of Jîvaka, the late court physician of Gandhâra, and knowing how highly the latter had praised the young man as his best disciple, the prince had unbounded confidence in the medical skill of his boyhood companion. He had suggested calling him when his father, the king, fell sick, but his advice had remained unheeded, and now being himself ill, he was impatient to have the benefit of his assistance.

Charaka gave his instructions to the princess and the other attendants and then sat down quietly by the bedside of the patient. When Kanishka awoke from his restless slumber, he extended his hand and tried to speak, but the physician hushed him, saying: "Keep quiet, and your life will be saved."

"I will be quiet," whispered Kanishka, not without great effort, "but save my life,—for the sake of my country, not for my own sake." After a pause he continued: "Tell my sister to call Matura, our brave and faithful Matura, to my bedside."

Matura, the scion of a noble Gandhâra family, had served his country on several occasions and was at present at the capital. He came and waited patiently till Charaka gave him permission to see the patient.

In this interview the prince explained to Matura the political situation since his father's death. His royal brother, now in the field against the Parthians, was at present the legitimate king. "During his absence," said Kanishka, "the duty devolves on me, as the vicegerent of the crown, to keep the mountaineers out of the kingdom, and I call upon you to serve me as chancellor in this critical situation. Raise troops to expel the marauders, but at the same time exhaust diplomatic methods by appealing to the honor and dignity of the kingdom of Magadha of whom these robber tribes are nominal subjects."

Thus Matura took charge of state affairs and Charaka and Kamalavatî united in attending to the treatment of the sick prince. They had weary nights and hours of deep despondency when they despaired of the recovery of their beloved patient, but the crisis came and Kanishka survived it. He regained strength, first slowly, very slowly, then more rapidly, until he felt that he was past all danger.

The rainy season had given the people of Gandhâra a respite from the suffering caused by the hostilities of their enemies. The king, Kanishka's elder brother, continued to wage war against the Parthians and concentrated his forces for striking a decisive blow. But while the best troops of the country had thus still to be employed against a formidable foe, the mountaineers renewed their raids, and the king of Magadha, too weak to interfere with his stubborn vassals, pleaded their cause declaring that they had grievances against the Kingdom of Gandhâra and could therefore not be restrained. The prince accordingly declared war on the Kingdom of Magadha. He raised an army, and the young men of the

peasantry, who had suffered much from this state of unrest, gladly allowed themselves to be enlisted in the army.

During the preparations for the expedition against Magadha there came tidings from the Parthian frontier that the troops of Gandhâra had gained a decisive victory which, however, was dearly bought, for the king himself who had been foremost among the combatants, died a glorious death on the field of battle. The crown now passed to Kanishka who deemed it his first duty to overcome the enemies of his nation. Leaving the trusted generals of his brother in command of the victorious army in Parthia, he placed himself at the head of the troops destined to march against Magadha. Charaka was requested to accompany him in the field, and Matura remained behind as chancellor of the state.

Charaka loved the princess without knowing it. She had been kindly disposed toward him from childhood; but her interest was heightened to admiration since she had observed him at the bedside of her brother. How noble he was, how thoughtful, how unselfish; and at the same time how wise in spite of his youth. When the two parted she said: "Take care of my brother, be to him as a guardian angel; and," added the princess smiling, "be good to yourself,—for my sake."

Charaka stood bewildered. He felt his cheeks flushing, and did not know what to think or say. All at once he became conscious of the fact that a powerful yearning had gradually grown up in his heart, and a tender and as yet undefined relation had become established between himself and the princess. He was not sure, however, whether it was right for him to accept and press the beautiful woman's hand that was offered him in unaffected friendliness and with maidenly innocence. He stood before her like a schoolboy censured for a serious breach of the school regulations. He stammered; his head drooped; and at last covering his eyes with his hand, he began to sob like a child with a guilty conscience.

At this moment Kanishka approached to bid his sister good-bye; and after a few words of mutual good wishes Charaka and Kamalavatî parted.

While the king and his physician were riding side by side, their home behind them, their enemy in front, Kanishka inquired about the trouble which had stirred Charaka to tears. And Charaka said: "It is all my fault. When your sister bade me farewell, I became aware of a budding love toward her in my soul, and I feel that she reciprocates my sentiment. I know it is sinful, and I will

not yield to temptation, but I am weak, and that brought tears to my eyes. I feel ashamed of myself."

"Do you deem love wrong?" inquired the king.

"Is not celibacy the state of holiness," replied Charaka, "and is not marriage a mere concession to worldliness, being instituted for the sake of preventing worse confusion?"

"You ought to know more about it than I," continued Kanishka, "for you devoted yourself to religion by joining the brotherhood, while I am a layman, and my religious notions are not grounded on deeper knowledge."

"Alas!" sighed Charaka, "I am not fit to be a monk. The abbot at the Vihâra could not help me and advised me to have my doubts allayed and the problems of my soul settled by Açvaghosha of Magadha, the great philosopher and saint who is said to understand the doctrine of the Blessed One, the Buddha."

"What is the problem that oppresses you?" inquired King Kanishka. "Is your soul burdened with sin?"

"I am not guilty of a sinful deed, but I feel that my soul is sinful in its aspirations. My heart is full of passion, and I have an ambitious mind. I would perform great deeds, noble and miraculous, and would solve the problem of life; I would fathom the mysteries of being and comprehend the law of existence, its source and its purpose. There is an undefined yearning in my breast, a desire to do and to dare, to be useful to others, to live to the utmost of my faculties, and to be rooted in the mysterious ground from which springs all the life that unfolds itself in the world. I came into being, and I shall pass out of existence. I believe that I existed before I was born, and that I shall exist after my death. But these other incarnations of mine are after all other than myself, other at least than my present existence. I understand very well that I am a reproduction of the life impulses that preceded me, and that I shall continue in subsequent reproductions of my Karma. But I feel my present self to be the form of this life which will pass away, and I yearn for a union with that eternal substratum of all life which will never pass away."

Kanishka said: "While I was ill I had occasion to meditate on the problem of life and life's relation to death. Once I was dreaming; and in the dream I was not Prince Kanishka, but a king, not King of Gandhâra, but of some unknown country, and I was leading my men in battle; and it happened, as in the case of my brother, that I was victorious, and the hostile army before me turned in wild flight, but in the moment of victory a dying enemy

shot an arrow at me which pierced my heart, and I knew my end was come. There was a pang of death, but it was not an unpleasant sensation, for my last thought was: 'Death in battle is better than to live defeated.'¹ I awoke. A gentle perspiration covered my forehead, and I felt as though I had passed through a crisis in which I had gained a new lease of life. My dream had been so vivid that when I awoke I had the impression that I and all the visions that surrounded me had been annihilated; yet after a while, when my mind was again fully adjusted, the dream appeared empty to me, a mere phantasma and illusion. Will it not be similar, if at the moment of death we make our final entrance into Nirvâna? Nirvâna appears to us in our present existence as a negative state but our present existence is phenomenal, while Nirvâna is the abiding state."

Charaka replied: "I should think there is much truth in your words. But the Tathâgata teaches that by attaining enlightenment, we shall enter Nirvâna even in this present life; and if we do so, it seems to me that our main advantage lies in the comprehension of the transiency of all bodily existence and the permanence of our spiritual nature. Death has lost its terrors to him who sees the immortal state. He knows that in death he shuffles off the mortal. But here my difficulty begins. I long for Nirvâna only as a means to enrich this present life.

"The Tathâgata teaches that life is suffering, and he is right. I do not doubt it. He has further discovered the way of emancipation, which is the eightfold noble path of righteousness. Now, I love life in spite of its suffering, and I am charmed with love. Love is life-giving, heart-gladdening, courage-inspiring! Oh, I love love, real worldly love! I admire heroism, the wild heroism of the battle-field! I long for wisdom, not the wisdom of the monks, but practical science which teaches us the why and wherefore of things and imparts to us the wizard's power over nature. Now, with all this I love righteousness; I feel the superiority of religious calmness, and the blissfulness of Nirvana. I do not cling to self, but desire to apply myself: I want a field of activity. All these conflicting thoughts produce in me the longing for a solution: there it lies before me as an ideal which I cannot grasp, and I call it God. Oh, that I could speak to the Tathâgata face to face; that I could go to him for enlightenment, that I could learn the truth so as to walk on the right path and find peace of soul in the tribulations of life. Since the Lord Buddha is no longer walking with us in the

¹ Padhâna sutta, 16. S. B. E., X., p. 71.

flesh, there is only one man in the world who can help me in my distress, and that is the great disciple of the Blessed Master, the philosopher and saint Aṣvaghosha of Magadha."

"Aṣvaghosha of Magadha!" replied the King. "Very well! We are waging war with the King of Magadha. Let the prize of combat be the possession of Aṣvaghosha!"

MAGADHA.

War is always deplorable, but sometimes it cannot be avoided. And if that be the case, far from shunning it, a ruler, responsible for the welfare of his people, should carry it on resolutely and courageously with the one aim in view of bringing it speedily to a happy conclusion.

Such was Kanishka's maxim, and he acted accordingly. Having gathered as strong an army as he could muster, he surprised the mountaineers by coming upon them suddenly with superior forces from both sides. They made a desperate resistance, but he overthrew them and, leaving garrisons in some places of strategic importance, carried the war farther into the heart of the Kingdom of Magadha. He descended into the valley of the Ganges, and hurrying by forced marches through the vassal kingdoms of Delhi and Sravasti, the Gandhâra army marched in four columns toward the capital of the country.

Subâhu, King of Magadha, met his adversary in the field near Pâtaliputra with an army that had been rapidly assembled, but he could not stay the invader's victorious progress. In several engagements his troops were scattered to the four winds, his elephants captured, and he was obliged to retire to the fortress of Pâtaliputra. There he was besieged, and when he saw that no hope of escape was left he decided to make no further resistance and sent a messenger to King Kanishka, asking him for terms of peace.

The victor demanded an indemnity of three hundred million gold pieces, a sum which the whole Kingdom of Magadha could not produce.

When the besieged king asked for less severe terms, Kanishka replied: "If thou art anxious to procure peace, come out to me in person, and I will listen to your proposition. I wish to see you. Let us meet face to face, and we will consider our difficulties."

Subâhu, knowing the uselessness of further resistance, came out with his minister and accompanied by his retinue. He was

conducted into the presence of Kanishka, who requested him to be seated.

The King of Magadha complied with the request of his victorious rival with the air of a high-minded man, the guest of his equal. Kanishka frowned upon him. He observed the self-possession of his conquered foe with a feeling of resentment, which, however, was somewhat alloyed with admiration.

After a pause he addressed the royal petitioner as follows: "Why didst thou not render justice to me when I asked for it?"

"My intentions were good," replied Subâhu, "I wanted to preserve peace. The mountaineers are restless, but they are religious and full of faith. Their chieftains assured me the people had only retaliated wrongs that they had suffered themselves. Trying to be fair and just to my vassals, I roused the worse evil of war, and in preserving the peace at home I conjured up the specter of hostility from abroad. He who would avoid trouble sometimes breeds greater misfortune."

"In other words," interrupted King Kanishka sternly, "your weakness prevented you from punishing the evil-doers under your jurisdiction, and being incapable of governing your kingdom, you lost your power and the right to rule."

"Sir," replied the humiliated monarch with calm composure, "thou art the victor and thou canst deal with me at thy pleasure, but if the fortunes of the day had turned against thee, thou mightest stand now before me in the same degraded position in which thou now seest me. But the difference is this: I have a clean conscience; I proved peaceful; I never gave offence to anybody,—consciously. Thou hast carried the war into my country. Thou art the offender; and shouldst thou condemn me to die, I shall die innocent to be reborn in a happier state under more auspicious conditions. The Lord Buddha be praised!"

Kanishka was astonished at the boldness of the king's speech, but he mastered his anger and replied calmly: "Art thou so ignorant as not to know that a ruler's first duty is justice, and to me justice thou hast refused!"

"Man's first duty is to seek salvation," replied the king of Magadha, "and salvation is not obtained by harshness but by piety."

The King of Gandhâra rose to his feet: "You are fitted for a monk, not a monarch. You had better retire to the cloistered cell of a Vihâra than occupy the throne of a great empire. What is the use of piety if it does not help you to attend to the duties of your

high office? It leads you to misery and has cost you your throne. The world cannot prosper on the principles which you follow."

Subâhu seemed imperturbable, and without deigning to look at the incensed face of his vituperator he exclaimed: "What is the world if we but gain salvation? Let all the thrones on earth be lost and whole nations perish when only emancipation can be obtained! We want escape, not secular enhancement."

Kanishka stared at the speaker as if unable to comprehend his frame of mind, and Subâhu without showing any concern quoted a stanza from the Dhammapada, saying:

"The kings' mighty chariots of iron will rust,
And also our bodies dissolve into dust,
But the deeds of the pure
Will forever endure."

Filled with admiration of Subâhu's fortitude, Kanishka said: "I see thou art truly a pious man. But thy piety is not of the right kind. Thy way of escape leads into emptiness, and thy salvation is hollow. This world is the place in which the test of truth must be made; and this life is the time in which it is our duty to attain Nirvâna. But I will not now upbraid thee for thy errors; I will first raise thee to a dignified position in which thou canst answer me and give thy arguments. I understand that thou art a faithful disciple of the Buddha and meanest to do that which is right. I respect thy sincerity and greet thee as a brother. Therefore I will not deprive thee of thy crown and title if thou payest the penalty of three hundred million gold pieces. Thou shalt remain king with the understanding that henceforth thou takest council with me on all questions of political importance, for I see clearly that thou standest in need of advice. But in place of the three hundred million gold pieces I will accept substitutes which I deem worth that amount. First, thou shalt deliver into my hands the bowl which the Tathâgata, the Blessed Buddha, carried in his hand when he was walking on earth, and, secondly, as a ransom for thy royal person which I hold here besieged in Pâtaliputra I request from thee the philosopher Ashvaghosha whose fame has spread through all the countries where the religion of enlightenment is preached."

The vanquished king said: "Truly, the bowl of Buddha and the philosopher Ashvaghosha are amply worth three hundred million gold pieces, and yet I must confess that you are generous and your conditions of peace fair."

"Do not call me generous," said Kanishka, embracing the

King of Magadha, "I am only wordly wise ; and it is not my own wisdom. I have learned the maxims of my politics from the Blessed One, the great Buddha."

ACVAGHOSHA.

Buddha's birthday was celebrated with greater rejoicing than usual in the year following King Kanishka's invasion, which took place in the fifth century after the Nirvâna. The formidable invaders had become friends and the people were joyful that the war clouds had dispersed so rapidly.

Kanishka was in good spirits. He was elated by his success, but it had not made him overbearing, and he was affable to all who approached him. In a short time he had become the most powerful monarch of India, his sway extending far beyond the boundaries of his own kingdom. His generals had been victorious over the Parthians in the far West and his alliance with the King of Magadha made him practically ruler over the valley of the Ganges. But more effective than his strategy and the might of his armies was the kindness which he showed to his vanquished enemies. Princes of smaller dominions willingly acknowledged his superiority and submitted to him their difficulties because they cherished an unreserved confidence in his fairness and love of justice. Thus was laid the foundation of a great empire upon whose civilisation the religion of the Enlightened One exercised a decided influence. Peace was established, commerce and trade flourished, and Greek sculptors flocked to Gandhâra, transplanting the art of their home to the soil of India.

It was the beginning of India's golden age which lasted as long as the Dharma, the doctrine of the Tathâgata, remained pure and undefiled. A holy enthusiasm seized the hearts of the people and there were many who felt an anxiety to spread the blessings of religion over the whole world. Missionaries went out who reached Thibet and China and even far-off Japan where they sowed the seeds of truth and spread the blessings of lovingkindness and charity.

Kanishka and the King of Magadha enjoyed each other's company. The two allied monarchs started on a peaceful pilgrimage to the various sacred spots of the country. They visited Lumbini, the birthplace of the Bodhisattva. Thence passing over the site of Kapilavastu, the residence of Shuddhodana, Buddha's father in the flesh and the haunt of Prince Siddhârtha in his youth, they went to the Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya and returned to the capital

Benares, to celebrate the birth festival of the Buddha in the Deer Park, on the very spot where the revered Teacher had set the wheel of truth in motion to roll onward for the best of mankind,—the wheel of truth which no god, no demon, nor any other power, be it human, divine, or infernal, should ever be able to turn back.

A procession went out to the holy place and circumambulated the stupa, erected on the sacred spot in commemoration of the memorable event, and the two monarchs, who had but a short time before met as foes on the battlefield, walked together like brothers, preceded by white-robed virgins bearing flowers, and followed by priests chanting gâthâs of the blessings of the good law and swinging censers. No display of arms was made but multitudes of peaceful citizens hailed the two rulers and blessed the magnanimity of the hero of Gandhâra.

When the procession halted, Kanishka and his brother king stood in front of a statue of the Buddha and watched the process of depositing flowers. "Who is the beautiful maiden that is leading the flower carriers?" asked Kanishka of the King of Magadha in a whisper; and the latter replied: "It is Bhadrâçrî, my only daughter."

Kanishka followed with his eye the graceful movements of the princess and breathed a prayer: "Adoration to the Buddha!" he said to himself in the silent recesses of his heart. "The Buddha has guided my steps and induced me to make peace before the demons of war could do more mischief. I now vow to myself that if the princess will accept me I shall lead her as queen to my capital and she shall be the mother of the kings of Gandhâra to come. May the Tathâgata's blessing be on us and my people!"

At the stupa of the first sermon of the Buddha, peace was definitely concluded. The King of Magâdha delivered to his powerful ally the sacred bowl, a treasure which, though small in size, was esteemed worth more than half the kingdom of Magadha; and Ashvaghosha, the old philosopher, was bidden to appear at court and be ready to accompany the ruler of Gandhâra to his home in the northwest of India.

Ashvaghosha arrived at the Deer Park in a royal carriage drawn by white horses, and there he was presented to King Kanishka. He bowed reverently and said: "Praised be the Lord Buddha for his blessed teachings! Gladness fills my heart when I think how your majesty treats your vanquished foe. The victorious enemy has become a friend and brother, making an end of all hostility for ever."

“Good, my friend,” replied Kanishka; “if there is merit in my action I owe thanks for my karma to the Tathâgata. He is my teacher and I bless the happy day on which I became his disciple. My knowledge, however, is imperfect and even my learned friend Charaka is full of doubts on subjects of grave importance. Therefore I invite you to accompany me to Gandhâra, where my people and myself are sorely in need of your wisdom and experience.”

“Your invitation is flattering,” said the philosopher, “and it is tendered in kindly words; but I pray you, noble sir, leave me at home. I am an aged man and could scarcely stand the exertion of the journey. But I shall be yours for the rest of my life and whatever be your command, I shall obey.”

“Charaka!” said the king, “have a room fitted up for Ashvaghosha in our residence at Benares, and so long as we remain here he shall pass the time in our company. Let him be present at our meals, and when we rest in the evening from the labors of the day let us listen to the words of the philosopher who is regarded as the best interpreter of the significance of Buddha’s teachings.”

Turning to Ashvaghosha, Kanishka continued: “And now, let us hear, venerable sir, what the Buddha would have taught about God,—not about Brahma the personified principle of being, nor about Ishvara, the idea of a personal Lord and manufacturer of universes, but of God as goodness, as truth, as righteousness, as love. Is God in this sense or not? Is it a dream or a reality? What is it and how do we know of it?”

“You ask a question to answer which will take a book. But I shall be brief. Certainly, God in this sense is a reality. God, in this sense, is the good law that shapes existence, leading life step by step onward and upward toward its highest goal—enlightenment. Recognition of this law gives us light on the conditions of our existence so as to render it possible for us to find the right path; and we call it Amitâbha, the source of infinite light. Amitâbha is the norm of all nature involving the bliss of goodness and the curse of wrong-doing according to irrefragable causation.”

“Then Amitâbha is the principle of being as much as Brahma?” enquired Charaka.

“Brahma is a personification of the principle of being,” replied Ashvaghosha, “but Amitâbha is the standard of being. Amitâbha is the intrinsic law which, whenever being rises into existence, moulds life and develops it, producing uniformities and regularities in both the world of realities and the realm of thought. It is the source of rationality and righteousness, of science and of

morality, of philosophy and religion. The sage of the Shakyas is one ray of its light only, albeit for us the most powerful ray, with the clearest, brightest, and purest light. He is the light that came to us here in this world and in our country. Wheresoever wisdom appears, there is an incarnation, more or less partial, more or less complete, of Amitâbha."

"But existence," rejoined Charaka, "is different from the good law. Being is one thing and the norm that moulds it another. There is the great question, whether or not life itself is wrong. If life is wrong, the joy of living is sin, the enhancement of life, including its reproduction, an error, and love, the love of husband and wife, becomes a just cause for repentance."

"Mark the doctrine, noble youth, and act accordingly," replied Ashvaghosha. "I read in your eyes the secret of your heart which prompts you to ask this question. Goodness is a reality which exists in both existence and non-existence. Call it God or Amitâbha, or Allhood, or the eternal and uncreated, the universal law, the not-bodily, the nothing or non-existence, for it is not concrete nor material, nor real to the senses,—yet it exists, it is spiritual and can be discovered by the mind; it is and remains for all that exists the intrinsic and necessary norm; it is the rule and regulation for both things and thoughts. It is omnipresent in the universe, invisible, impalpable, as a perfume that permeates a room. Whatever makes its appearance as a concrete reality is affected by its savor and nothing can be withdrawn from its sway. It is not existence itself, but the womb of existence; it is that which gives definite shape to beings, moulding them and determining them according to conditions. You have Amitâbha in two aspects as the formation of particular existence and as the general law of universal types. The particular is the realisation of the universal; and the universal constitutes the type of the particular, giving it a definite character. Neither is without the other. Mere particularity is being in a state of ignorance; thus all life starts in ignorance; but mere universality is existence unrealised; it is as though existence were not. Therefore enjoyment of life is not wrong and the love of husband and wife is no cause for repentance, if it be but the right love, true and unailing and making each willing to bear the burdens of the other.

"The Lord spoke not of God, because the good law that becomes incarnated in Buddhahood is not a somebody, not an entity, not an ego, not even a ghost. As there is not a ghost-soul, so there is not a ghost-God."

Said Charaka: "Now I understand the picture of the Lord Buddha with his two attendants, Love as Particularity on the elephant and Wisdom as universality on the lion. Ānanda the disciple of loving service and Kāshyapa the disciple of philosophical intellectuality have approached their master and grasped the significance of his doctrine from two opposite and contrasting sides."

"Those who mortify their bodies," continued Ashvaghosha, "have not understood the doctrine. We are not ego-souls. For that reason the thought of an individual escape, the salvation of our ego-soul, is a heresy and an illusion. We all stand together and every man must work for the salvation of mankind. Therefore I love to compare the doctrine of the Buddha to a great ship or a grand vehicle—a Mahâyāna—in which there is room for all the multitudes of living beings and we who stand at the helm must save them all or perish with them."

Charaka extended his hand and said: "I thank you, venerable sir, for the light you have afforded me. I sought peace of soul in a monastery, but the love of life, the love of God, the love of knowledge, the love of my heart, drove me back to the world. I have proved useful to King Kanishka as a physician, perhaps also as a friend, and as a disciple of the Gathāgata; and the problem before me is, whether it is right for me to remain in the world, to be a householder, to allow the particular, the sensual, the actual, a share in life by the side of the universal, the spiritual, the ideal."

"Do not despise the particular, the sensual, the actual," replied Ashvaghosha. "In the material body the spiritual truths of goodness and love and veracity are actualised. Existence, if it is mere existence, quantity of life and not quality, is worthless and contemptible. The sage despises it. The sensual, if it be void of the spiritual, is coarse and marks the brute. But existence is not wrong in itself, nor is the sensual without its good uses. The sensual, in its very particularity, by being an aspiration that is actual, becomes consecrated in spirituality. Think how holy is the kiss of true love; how sacred is the relation between husband and wife. It is the particular in which the universal must be realised, mere abstract goodness is useless, and the nature of goodness will become apparent only in the vicissitudes of actual life."

"If I could serve the Buddha as a householder, my highest ambition would be to be a brother-in-law to King Kanishka" replied Charaka.

"I know it," said Ashvaghosha with a smile, "for the emotions of your heart are reflected in your eyes. Go home and

greet the King's sister with a saying of the Blessed One, and when you are married may your happiness be in proportion to your merit, or even greater and better. Buddha's doctrine is not extinction, not nihilism, but a liberation of man's heart from the fetters of selfishness and from the seclusion of a separate egoity. It is not the suppression or eradication of love, and joy, and family ties, but their perfection and sanctification; not a cessation of life, but a cessation of ignorance, indolence, and ill will, for the sake of gaining enlightenment, which is life's end and aim."

"Your instruction has benefited me too," said Kanishka to the philosopher, and turning round to the King of Magadha he continued, "but you my noble friend and host are still my debtor. Since Ashvaghosha on account of his age finds himself unable to follow me to Gandhâra, you are in duty bound to procure an acceptable substitute. Now, there is a way of settling your obligations to me, and that could be done if your daughter, the Princess Bhadraçrî would consent to accept my hand and accompany me to Gandhâra as my wife and queen!"

"My august friend," replied the King of Magadha, "I know that the Princess worships you for the heroism you have displayed in battle, the wisdom you have shown in council, and the magnanimity with which you have dealt with your conquered enemy. She beholds in you not only the ideal of royalty but also the restorer of her father's fortunes, worthy of her sincerest gratitude. It is but for you to make her admiration blossom out into rich love and wifely devotion."

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]