

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

VOL. XLI (No. 8)

AUGUST, 1927

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BUDDHA OF KAMAKURA

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THE FORMATION OF THE EARLY BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

BY HOWARD W. OUTERBRIDGE, M. A. ; S. T. D.

TO attempt an outline of the formation of the Buddhist Scriptures is a task of such magnitude, and would require so many years of preparatory study, and the knowledge of so many languages, both living and dead, that it is beyond the range of possibility at this time. The best we can hope to do in this chapter is to note the general characteristics of the problem, with a view to a further study of the underlying facts which form the basis of the traditions concerning the life of Sakyamuni, the great founder of Buddhism.

A most important element in preparing for such a study is to set the limits of our endeavours. If all the works of Buddhist Scholars were to be examined, which contain references to the life of the great Founder, the study of many thousands of volumes would be necessary,—most of which have never been translated into English. In certain sects of Japanese Buddhism, for instance, no less than six or seven thousand volumes are recognized as canonical, besides many thousands of commentaries, etc. A study of all of these is of course impossible. It is also unnecessary, since these works are all of late date, and whatever information they contain in regard to events in the life of Sakyamuni, are based upon other earlier works, many of which are themselves available. Subsequent additions to the stories had better be disregarded, for the most part, as being the product of the pious imaginings of a later generation. We will therefore confine our attention for the present to a survey of the writings which were produced during the first few centuries of Buddhism,—those which seem to have been recognized by primi-

tive Buddhism as canonical, or authentic records of what took place during the formative period of that religion.

The first fact which seems clear is that we have no manuscripts coming down from the time of Sakyamuni, or from anywhere near his time. The Indian climate, unlike that of Egypt, was not such as to make possible the long preservation of manuscripts. They must inevitably decay during the centuries. A well-known authority on the subject,—Mr. A. Burrell, writing in the *Indian Antiquarian* (1880, p. 233) says: “No manuscripts written one thousand years ago are now extant in India, and it is almost impossible to find one written five hundred years ago, for the manuscripts which claim to be of that date are merely old manuscripts, the dates of which are repeated by the copyists.” Even had it been possible to preserve the manuscripts during all the centuries, the facts seem to indicate that there were none belonging to the period of Sakyamuni to preserve. In the first place, there was no suitable material. The use of parchment, while common in other lands was not encouraged in India for religious reasons, and the use of leaves or papyrus had not yet come into vogue. Secondly, there is no reference made in any of the early books of Buddhism to a written record. When a point of dispute arose regarding teaching, it was to the memory of those who knew the teaching that an appeal was made. In a section of the *Cullavagga*, one of the later books of the Pali Canon, where the settlement of disputes by the jury method is taught,¹ it is expressly allowed to reject from the jury those Bikkhus or disciples to whom the particular book of instructions in point had not been “handed down”,—a procedure scarcely possible if there had been a written record to which an appeal could have been made. The same book speaks of some who were apparently professional reciters or preachers of certain portions of the Buddhist teachings, the Vinayas, Dhamma or Suttas. As late as the third century B. C., reciters of the Pitakas are mentioned, and when, during the same century, missionaries were sent to the island of Ceylon, it was necessary for them first to spend three years in learning to recite the Buddhist teachings.

It must not be inferred, however, that writing was not known in India at the time of Sakyamuni. Mention is made of the art of

¹Book IV, 14, *Sacred Books of the East*, XV.

writing, in the Pali canon² which indicates that it was well known, though the absence of any common and easily available writing material greatly limited its use. The great stone column erected by Asoka to mark the birthplace of the founder of Buddhism, bears upon it an inscription in the Megadhi language, which without doubt comes down from the time of King Asoka himself. (259-195 B. C.) This inscription, together with some pictures representing scenes from the Jatakas, form the oldest extant records of primitive Buddhism.

The passage in the Mahavagga already referred to (I, 49) suggests that at the time it was composed, the art of writing was largely confined to inscriptions in stone. The section reads,

“Upali’s father and mother said to themselves, ‘If Upali could learn writing, he would after our death, live a life of ease and without pain’. But then Upali’s father and mother thought again, ‘If Upali learns writing his fingers will become sore.’”

The record then continues that these indulgent parents began to consider arithmetic a safer occupation than the apparently dangerous one of writing. If anything can be taken from the story, it strengthens the supposition that, though writing was well known in this early period of Buddhism, it was of little practical value for the preservation of lengthy records, but was rather chiefly concerned with stone-cutting or carving, which caused “sore fingers”,—though otherwise a gainful occupation.

As is well known, the preservation of valuable records by oral tradition was, throughout all the East, and especially in India, the recognized and most efficient way of transmission. The amazing diligence and exactness with which the Hindus have transmitted the Vedas through thousands of years by oral tradition is evidence of the wonderful efficiency of the system. It seems to have been less liable to the production of mistakes and variant readings than the method of transcription.³ It is probable that, as a consequence of this fact, no great need was felt at first for anything more than an oral tradition. But when Buddhism began to spread, the necessity for a written canon gradually appeared. It is possible that the consciousness of this need, which has been so evident in later Buddhism,

²Ex. gr. Mahavagga, 1, 49, *S. B. E.*, XIII, 201. See also *S. B. E.* XI, p. XXII.

³Compare the fifty to eighty thousand variant readings in the Bible with the two thousand only in the Rig Veda.

may have been the reason for the fact that a Chinese scholar, Hioun Tshang, who travelled in India during the seventh century A. D., brought back the tradition,—also taught by Asvaghosha,—that the text of the Pali Canon had been committed to writing on leaves, immediately after the death of Sakyamuni. While there is no evidence whatever of this claim, the fact that it is so largely accepted by Buddhists today shows that the need for an authoritative record existed, and continues to exist.

Though there is no probability that written records go back to that time, there are strong traditions, which some European scholars think well founded, that there was an attempt to fix upon certain authentic teachings of Buddha, at the first Council, held at Ragagaha in 477 B. C., a week after his death. Just how large this body of authentic teaching was, it is impossible to discover. That it could not be the same as our present Pali Canon is evident. The traces of a later date are too unmistakable. The stories not only of the first Council, but of the second also,—one hundred years later,—are themselves contained in the Canon.⁴ It seems probable however, that certain portions of the Canon in its present form do go back to the time of the great founder, and represent the very words spoken by him. Some portions of the Dhammapada, the Sermon of Benares, and other sections, not so well known, bear traces of such originality.

The question of the language in which these scriptures were written should be mentioned here. The probability seems to have been that the language of Sakya and his followers was Magadhi,⁵ a language now dead, but closely akin to the Pali,—so closely resembling it in fact, that tradition has identified them. Whatever differences there were may have been dialectical, such for example as are found between the English of London and Yorkshire.⁶ Sakyamuni himself seems to have made no effort to retain one language as the authentic medium of his teaching, but preferred to let each tribe receive it and pass it on in their own tongue. He went so far as to explicitly forbid the adoption of the sacred language of the Vedas, as the uniform language of his teachings.⁷ It was not long however before the purer Pali dialect began to supercede the earlier tongue.

⁴*Cullavagga*, Bks. XI and XII.

⁵The supremacy of Magadha in N. E. India was due to the conquest of Kosala and Vesali by Ajatasattu, son of King Bimbisara, one of Sakya's early converts. See below.

⁶See Eliot's *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol 1, p. 283.

⁷*Cullavagga*, V, 33.

and though there is evidence that certain Megadhi words were retained for a time, it was through the agency of the Pali, and later the Sanscrit languages that Buddhism made its way. The date when the change from Megadhi to Pali occurred cannot be fixed with certainty, but it was probably soon after the reign of Asoka in the third century B. C. The evidence for this date is to be found, on the one side, in the fact that the inscription mentioned above, and dating from Asoka's reign, is in Megadhi, showing that this was the language used by him at the time, and presumably by the great Council which met during his reign. Asoka gives a list of titles of Buddhist teachings, in the Megadhi language. There is also evidence that this was the language of the monks of Pataliputra, where, as some scholars suppose, the Canon was finally fixed. It was, however, just after this period, when Buddhism became a missionary religion, that the necessity for a change of language appeared.

The immediate effect of this missionary policy seems to have been the adoption of Pali, and later of Sanscrit as the media of transmission. As a result there have grown up two great bodies of literature, one in Pali and one in Sanscrit, through which the religion of the Buddha has been carried on and promoted. The first has been the sacred language of the Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia, into whose vernacular languages much of the Pali Canon has been translated. Sanscrit, on the other hand, has been the language of the Buddhism of North India, Nepal, Thibet, China, Japan and East Turkestan. The larger differences which underly these two branches of Buddhism we can discuss later.

THE PALI CANON

As already indicated, the task of fixing the date of the Pali Canon is a very difficult one. The Buddhist tradition which places it at the great Council of Ragagaha in 477 B. C. immediately after the death of Sakyamuni, is mistaken, though some portions of our present Canon may have been accepted as authentic at that time. Another date accepted by some is that of the Council of Vesali, one hundred years later, in 377 B. C. Still others think the Council held at the Monastery of Pataliputra in the reign of Asoka to have been the date. It is probably a mistake, however, to consider any one of these dates as the definite time when the Canon in its present form was compiled and accepted. The truth seems to be that the formation of the Canon was a gradual process, beginning soon after

the death of Sakyamuni, and continuing for several centuries. In the Cullavagga (Bks. XI and XII) we are told that, at the Council of Ragagaha, one week after their great master's death, Ananda, Kasyapa, Upali and others met together to recite the Dhamma, (teaching) and Vinaya (discipline) in order that their thinking and conduct might be purified.

"Come let us chant together the Dhamma and the Vinaya, before what is not Dhamma is spread abroad and what is Dhamma is put aside, before what is not Vinaya is spread abroad, and what is Vinaya is put aside, before those who argue against the Dhamma become powerful, and those who hold to the Dhamma become weak, before those who argue against the Vinaya become powerful and those who hold to the Vinaya become weak." (Bk. XI, 1).

This somewhat rambling, but characteristic statement suggests the recognition of a need, even at that early date, of strengthening the influence of the sacred words of the Tathagata, and the fact of their authority. In Bk. XII, which tells of the Council of Vesali a century later, much the same terminology is used, though a larger body of sacred teaching is recognized, including the Agamas or four Nikayas, and the Matikas.⁸ It is quite probable that at the Council of Pataliputra in 241 B. C., in the reign of King Asoka, a still larger body of teaching, including most of what we now have in the Pali Canon was adopted as authoritative by the leaders of Buddhism.

The evidence produced thus far seems to make clear that there actually took place just what one might naturally expect under the circumstances. The great leader bequeathed to his followers a body of teaching, repeated many times perhaps, in part at least, as he moved from place to place, and incorporating the fundamental doctrines and disciplines of his system. At the time of his death, the necessity of preserving these most valuable treasures was recognized, and the little inner circle of his followers sought by frequent repetition to fix them upon their memories. As the years passed by, it was found necessary to further add to the original body of doctrinal teachings, explanations and amplifications to meet the new questions which continually arose. On the other hand, the increased complications of life and new requirements for discipline made desirable by the growth of the order, necessitated further additions here also. These additions, given by the recognized leaders of the order, and claimed by them to be based on the teachings of the Blessed One

⁸*Kullavagga* XII, 1, 7, 8, 10 *S. B. E.* XX 394.

himself, were accepted without question by the followers of Buddhism and gradually became so incorporated into the original tradition as to be indistinguishable from it. This process continued until what was a comparatively small body of teaching at the time of the death of Sakyamuni had grown to its present enormous proportions.

It is altogether unlikely that we have coming down to us today any single book of the Pali Canon, or even any large part of any book which we can claim to be in the form in which it was originally given by Sakyamuni. We must rather think of the original teachings as being in the form of collections of sayings or anthologies which no longer exist as separate books, but have been incorporated into others. It may even be possible, as Rhys Davids suggests⁹ that this process has been twice repeated in the development of the teachings as we now have them. This older material,—which has been compared to the “Logia” of Jesus incorporated into the Gospels,—would naturally be of the nature of short sermons, parables, doctrinal expositions, and such treatises upon discipline and conduct, as the great teacher found necessary for the development of his work. This quite natural supposition finds ample ratification in the evidence which is available. The material which is the core of the teachings of the Tripitaka is precisely of this fundamental character, and suggests that a nucleus has sometimes been worked over in several different ways, each independent of the other, but each finding its source and inspiration in one and the same body of original teaching.

The most trustworthy attempt which has been made to reconstruct chronologically the order in which the various parts of the Tripitaka were produced is found in Rhys Davids last work,¹⁰ in which he makes the following suggestions in regard to their probable order of composition. He places as earliest those brief statements of Buddhist Doctrine which are found to recur in many or all of the Buddhist books; to be followed by those episodes which are found in identical words in two or more of them. These would correspond to the “Logia” which New Testament scholars presume are the earliest underlying sources of our gospels. Next to these more or less scattered and often brief extracts, he places four portions; the Silas or tracts on morality which are found in each

⁹Preface Vol. IV, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*.

¹⁰*Buddhist India*, p. 188.

of the thirteen divisions of the Suttantas of the Dilgha Nikaya,¹¹ the Parayana and Octades which comprise two Cantos of the Sutta Nipata, and the Patimokka or first portion of the Vinaya Pitaka. Following these are to be found certain sections of the first four Nikayas. Then sections E, H, I, C, and A of the Fifth, the Jatakas and the Dhammapada. The last upon the list are the books of the third or Abhidhamma Pitaka. This last portion is much later than the others, and was probably compiled by the Servastavadin school of Buddhism, in the time of Kanishka, in the second century A. D. It was perhaps written and added to the Canon after Buddhism went to Ceylon, though the time of its first dissemination is still an unsolved problem.¹²

All the books of the Pali Canon were probably in their present shape, with the exception of the Abhidhamma Pitaka just mentioned, at the time of the great Council of Pataliputra (241 B. C.) This does not mean that they were not added to or revised later, but it does mean a substantial agreement between the Canon of Asoka's time and our own. The evidence for this theory, which has gained quite universal acceptance among Buddhist scholars, is to be found *first* in the fact that, while the first two Councils,—those of Ragagaha and Vesali,—are mentioned in the Cullavagga, the third,—that of Pataliputra,—is not. This suggests, as Oldenberg points out, that an authoritative body of teachings was already fixed before that date, and the Council was necessary in order to add to it certain desirable portions. Secondly, there is a well attested story in Sinhalese Buddhism that during the reign of King Asoka, his son,—or nephew,—was sent as the first Buddhist missionary to Ceylon, and took with him the Tripitaka teachings in their present form, or approximately so. This tradition is probably true, as is evidenced by the fact that, whereas the Pali form of the Tripitaka has, from an early date been preserved almost exclusively in Ceylon, the civilization and background there reflected is that of Northern India. There is nothing whatever to suggest the environment of Ceylon as being behind any portion of it. In the North the prestige of this Canon was lost and gradually a new set of books was compiled to supersede that which had been transplanted to Ceylon.

The evidence goes farther to show that at the time when the Pali Canon was introduced into Ceylon, it was still in oral form, and

¹¹*S. B. B.*, II, p. 3-36.

¹²For complete list see Appendix A.

was reduced to writing at a later date. Among the Sinhalese Buddhist works which appeared after the introduction of Buddhism into Ceylon, there are two, the *Dipovamsa* and the *Mahavamsa* which tell of a visit of the Blessed One himself to Ceylon, and explain in this way their right to a first hand knowledge of Buddhist Doctrine. While this story cannot be credited, the *Mahavamsa* has another tradition which is worthy of our credence. It is to the effect that the monks of Mahavihara decided to write the teachings of Buddhism down, "in order that the faith might long endure".¹³ If this story is to be accepted,—as it is by most scholars,—the scriptures of the Pali Canon represent the recensions of the monks of the Mahavihara Monastery, belonging to the Vibhajjavadin sect. It therefore contains the canon of only one sect of Ceylonese Buddhism, and differs from that of other sects, more or less.

Tradition goes on to add that it was at the command of King Vattagamini of Ceylon that this final committment to writing took place. The date has been variously fixed as about 80-20 B. C. It is fairly clear that for at least one hundred and fifty or two hundred years after Mahinda took the teachings of Buddhism to Ceylon, they remained in oral form.

To review briefly the ground covered. It seems plain that the Tripitaka as we find it today in the Pali Canon was written during the first century B. C., in Ceylon, but was brought orally from Northern India a century or two before in practically its present form. It was therefore compiled for the most part during the period which elapsed between the death of Sakyamuni,—c. 477 B. C. and the Council of Asoka, c. 242 B. C. and was handed down by oral tradition. With the probable exception of the third or Abhidhamma Pitaka, most of the material was produced within the first two centuries after the death of Sakyamuni. Much of it goes back to his immediate disciples, and can be taken as the authentic teachings of the Blessed One himself. We will have occasion later to examine some of the earlier books of the Pitakas with special reference to the biographical material they contain.

THE SANSKRIT CANON

To apply the word Canon to the great mass of literature which was produced in Sanscrit Buddhism is really a misnomer. There have been many sects, and no Canon which has been recognized by

¹³Sinhalese *Mahavamsa*, XXXIII, 100-4.

all. The earliest books are based upon or are expansions of the works already contained in the Tripitaka. To these however there was later added a large body of scriptures which were based upon the later Mahayana or Greater Vehicle Buddhism, rather than the Hinayana. The gradual disappearance of Hinayana, and the emergence of the Mahayana sects in North India accounts for the fact that the Sanscrit scriptures are very largely Mahayana in doctrine, and therefore very far removed from the doctrines of original Buddhism.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the Mahayana scriptures are of less importance than the Hinayana. Their practical value far outranks that of the Pali Canon, because of the large number of the world's inhabitants who accepts them. The variety of languages into which they have been translated, and the enormous size of the literature which has grown out of them, makes the task of analysis and valuation a herculean one. Until there is a more careful study of these scriptures on the part of European scholars, however, it will be impossible to estimate the real significance of Buddhism throughout the ages.

The outstanding differences between the Hinayana and Mahayana might be summarized as follows. In the Mahayana teachings we find an attempt to suit Buddhism to the needs of the masses. The life of the "Arhat" who attempted to follow out Sakya's last injunction, "work out your own salvation" was too strenuous and difficult for the common folk. In other words, the need of redemption is felt. This expresses itself in the attempt to deify and universalize the Buddha into an Eternal Being, Adoration of this Eternal Being then becomes the way of Salvation rather than the unaided efforts of man. Further help is supplied by changing the idea of Arhat into that of "Bodhisattva" who not only achieves salvation for himself, but refuses to enter Nirvana until he has been able to store up merit for the salvation of mankind. A final point of difference is the enlargement of the idea of illusion to include not only "self" as the Pali scriptures teach, but the whole phenomenal world as well. All is "Maya."

The Sanscrit scriptures, representing a later development for the most part, have less of the historic sense than the Pali works. Large bodies of extraneous matter have been included, much of which is clearly irrelevant myth and legend. The task which lies before the student of Buddhism in the future is to attempt to make

a critical evaluation of this enormous field, which certainly contains many hidden gems, but up to the present lies unexplored.

CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL ON THE LIFE OF SAKYAMUNI

IT seems strange at first that the earliest Buddhist scriptures, viz. those which make up the Pali Canon, should contain no biography of Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism. It is true that they contain a certain amount of biographical material here and there, which can be pieced together to form a partial life history. But when this is done, the results are surprisingly meager and disappointing. Out of a collection of material approximately twice the size of our Old and New Testaments combined, all of which comes from the two or three centuries immediately following the death of the great Founder of Buddhism, and all of which was definitely selected because of its value for the Buddhist religion, we have a much less consistent and satisfactory account of his life than that which is to be found of the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.

Two further statements must be made however, to qualify what has just been said. In the first place, while he was undoubtedly the founder and organizer, the nature of the system which he set up gave him no vital part in its future. His dying word, "Work out your own salvation with diligence" was the keynote of primitive Buddhism. The interest of the early disciple of Buddhism was not in the details of his Master's history, but in the practical way of life which he had taught, and by means of which each might attain his own salvation. It was therefore quite natural that biography as such should hold a very subsidiary place.

Secondly, although the material is so meager and leaves whole periods of his life uncovered, we have nevertheless a picture of a figure which is very clear and striking at times, and which, even when its lines are hazy and indistinct, continues to dominate the whole scene. It leaves one eager for mere detail, but very thoroughly convinced that behind the great system which was founded and the way of life which was taught, there is a personality of exceptional power, and of real charm and beauty.

It is little wonder then, that we find a change taking place soon after the formation of the Pali Canon. In fact the tendency is clearly visible in certain parts of the Canonical books. The person of the founder began to be of increasing interest to the disciples. They

were not only interested in the new Way of Life which he taught, but were more and more inclined to find a Way of Salvation in Him. To the student of Christian theology, a distinct parallel will appear in the tendencies of the early Church to forget the teachings of Jesus, in their loyalty to His person. The parallel may be carried still further. Just as we have in the Apocryphal Gospels a group of pictures in which the miraculous and fantastic has entirely obscured the historical, so in the later non-canonical accounts of the Buddha there is a very large place given to impossible and miraculous stories about the wonders performed by Sakyamuni and his disciples. The task of sifting and evaluating these stories,—eliminating the legendary elements without destroying the precious core of truth upon which they are built,—is a most difficult one.

The most valuable sources of material which are available for study in English are the following.

1. The Pali Canon. As we have already seen, parts of this Canon go back to a very early period in Buddhist History. There are some indications that it was at first divided into five Nikayas, comprising much the same division as is now found in the second Pitaka, but including the first and parts of the third Pitakas among the Nikayas. This decision however was soon changed, and during the most of the history of Buddhism, the Pali Canon consisted of three Pitakas, or Baskets, commonly known by the Sanscrit term "Tripitaka". The idea which underlies the term basket is fairly easy for anyone who has lived in the East, and has witnessed the process of "handing down" taking place in the material realm. This method is used for coal or earth or sand, and the "basket" is the regular instrument of conveyance, as it is easily passed from one person to another. It is quite natural then, that the term should be used in regard to a body of teaching or doctrine, which was handed down from teacher to pupil, and from generation to generation. The inclusion of the Buddhist teaching into three baskets was a natural and convenient process.

The first of these baskets is called the Vinaya Pitaka, or Discipline Basket, and contains, (1) Rules for Monks and Nuns, regulating their conduct and discipline, residence in the rainy season, clothing, housing, medicine, etc. (2) The Kandakas or Chapters further subdivided into the Mahavagga or Greater Course and the Kullavagga or Lesser Course. Here we have one of the best sources of Biographical material, particularly in the Mahavagga, which in-

identally gives a considerable amount of valuable data concerning the life of Buddha. (3) The third section, the Parivara is simply an appendix, and is not translated into English.

The second basket is by far the largest and most important. It is called the Sutta Pitaka, or Teaching Basket, and contains two hundred and thirty seven Suttas, or bodies of teaching, divided into five Nikayas. This division is a purely arbitrary one, based upon the length or nature of the Suttas, and has no relation whatever to their teaching. (1) First the Digha Nikaya, or collection of long Suttas, contains thirty four in all, some of which are translated into English. In this collection occurs the most important single source of material for the life of Sakyamuni,—the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, or the Book of the Great Decease, which tells of the death of the Enlightened One, and is in all probability, the earliest and most authentic bit of record which we have of his life. It is the “earliest beginning of a biography”. Even here, however, we do not have a single consistent work. There is unmistakable evidence of a piecing together of two or more narratives, based upon two different and opposed views of the nature of the Buddha,—one picturing him as human, the other divine. The Mahapadamana Sutta gives an account of the Miracles of Buddha. It is therefore safe to consider it as quite late. A further evidence is found in the fact that it teaches the existence of seven Buddhas in all, of which Sakyamuni was the last. (2) The Majjhima Nikaya consists of 152 “Middle Length Suttas”, dealing with a large variety of subjects. Here too, different strata are clearly visible, some of which are early, taking a purely human view of the great teacher, others looking upon him as divine, and a miracle-worker. (3) The Samyutta Nikaya or Collection of Combined Lectures, contains 56 sections or Suttas, the most important of which is the last one, the famous “Sermon of Benares”, which tells how to set in motion the “Wheel of the Law”. This sermon has suffered later recensions no doubt, but there is evidence that in its main features it goes back to a very early date, and in all probability represents an actual discourse of Sakyamuni. It is very short, but contains the most fundamental teachings of his system. (4) The Anguttara Nikaya contains a collection of lectures dealing with subjects of which there are one, two, three or four, etc., right up to eleven. These subjects are chosen upon no other basis but their ability to fit into the numerical scheme. It is divided into eleven sections, and contains 2300 Suttas. Both the artificial scheme which

it represents, and the view of the person of Buddha which it reveals argues for its lateness. It is of little biographical value. (5) The *Kudda Nikaya* or Collection of Small-Piece Lectures, is divided into fifteen parts. The names of these have already been given¹⁴ so will not have to be repeated here. A large number and variety of subjects are dealt with. The *Dhammapadda* or Way of Virtue, which comes second in the list, is one of the best known and finest pieces of Buddhist literature. There are a large number of Psalms, some of which have been translated into English. The only section which is at all biographical in its nature is the collection of *Jatakas*, or stories of the career of the Buddha in some of his former rebirths. They are in reality however, Hindu folk-tales, which have been worked over for Buddhist purposes, and are not at all historical in their nature.

The Third Pitaka, *Abhidhamma Pitaka* or Higher Religion Basket, as we have already seen is of later date than the rest of the *Tripitaka*. It is more philosophical in its character, and of no value for biographical purposes. The tradition is that this is the teaching which the Buddha gave to the gods in heaven. It is much more profound than most of the other parts of the canonical writings. Some portions only are translated.

2. Non-Canonical sources. It is very evident that the early Buddhists felt the need of a consistent life history of their founder before many centuries had passed. Particularly was this the case in the *Mahayana* Sects which made his person rather than his teachings central. We accordingly find in later Buddhism a large number of "lives" of the Buddha, practically all of which present us with a picture which has been highly elaborated by the imaginations of the admirers and worshippers of the "Blessed One".

(1) *Buddha Charita*. This life of the Buddha was written in Sanscrit, probably by *Asvaghosha*. It is a little uncertain just which *Asvaghosha* it was (as there were at least two and perhaps three men of that name in early Buddhism. It seems probable however, that he lived in the first century A. D. The lateness of its date is evident (1) from the fact that it contains a large number of miraculous details, and (2) from the high degree of reverence paid to the person of the Buddha. The book as we now have it, and which has been translated into English in the *S. B. E.* series contains seventeen chapters, only thirteen of which, we are told, are the work of

¹⁴See Appendix.

Asvaghosha,—the last four being the work of a modern Nepalese writer, who seeks to supply the missing material relating to the later life of the Buddha. The thirteenth chapter brings us up to the great temptation of Sakyamuni by Mara. The effort to complete the story of his life in four chapters, when the first part has been related in such detail, at once strikes the reader as somewhat incongruous. It is very evidently a makeshift. So far as the original goes however, it is perhaps the most satisfactory, and certainly one of the very earliest,—if not quite the earliest—attempts to give a complete historical sketch of the great founder of Buddhism.

2. *The Fo Sho Tsan King*. This work, also translated into English in the *S. B. E.* series is a translation into Chinese of the Buddha Charita of Asvaghosha,—at least that is what it purports to be. In some parts the resemblance is so slight however that it seems scarcely discernable. In other places, while the resemblance of thought is visible, the one is clearly a very loose paraphrase of the other, with no attempt whatever at verbal accuracy, or even identity of thought, so far as one can tell from the translations. It is true however, that up to the fourteenth chapter much the same program is followed, and the same subjects dealt with. Giving due allowance for the translator's license, and the desire to express his own personality and loyalty in his translation, it is quite possible to believe that the Buddha Charita of Asvaghosha was the basis of the Chinese work,—up to the thirteenth chapter. From that point on there is no resemblance in the two works as they now exist. The question at once arises, what is the source of the material which underlies the latter part of the Chinese work. One answer would be that the author left the Buddha Charita and has sought elsewhere for his material. The Mahavagga and in particular the Mahaparinibbana Sutta are sources which at once suggest themselves. It seems more likely however that the original Buddha Charita did actually contain the complete life history of the founder until his death, and the history of the movement for some time after. This latter part, now lost, was perhaps founded upon the original sources just mentioned,—the Mahavagga and the Mahaparinibbana Sutta,—which accounts for the resemblance which the Chinese version bears to them. It seems quite probable then that the Fo Sho Hing Tsan King is throughout a free paraphrase, but otherwise a fairly true translation of the original and complete Buddha Charita.

3. Other Chinese *Lives of Buddha*. While the one just mentioned is the most reliable¹⁵ there are no less than fourteen other Chinese "lives" known to European scholars. Several of them purport to be translations into Chinese of the Abhinishtaramana Sutta, otherwise known as the Lalita Vistara. Another of these is translated into English in Beal's Romantic History of Buddha, which he claims is based upon the Fo Pen Hing King, (or Fo Pen Hing Tshi King?) which in turn was perhaps a translation of the Lalita Vistara.

4. *Lalita Vistara*. This work, which has been the basis of many of the later biographies seems to have been originally the Buddha biography of the Saravastavadins, with certain later recensions by Mahayana scholars. The name signifies that it contains a detailed account of the play of Buddha. The date and author are uncertain. It was written originally in Sanscrit prose. There is an English translation by Ragendralala Mitra, and a careful one in French. Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" was based upon the account given in this work. This poem, which to my mind is one of the finest in English literature, gives a most interesting and fascinating picture of the great sage. It is very clearly however, a poetical work and not an historical evaluation of the facts of the life of Sakyamuni. The rich imaginative oriental pictures of the Lalita Vistara have been still further enriched or softened by occidental tintings. The result while most delightful from an aesthetic point of view, adds nothing to the store of facts for which we are searching.

5. *The Jina Charita*. This work which comes from Ceylon, has held an important place in the history of Buddhism in that island, but seems to be little known outside. It is supposed to have been written by a King of Ceylon, named Medhankara. There were three kings of that name, it seems, but as their reigns all occurred between the years 1071-1265 A. D. it makes little real difference which it was.¹⁶ It is very clearly of late origin. It is a very short work, partly poetical in its nature, and gives a fairly concise account of the usually accepted events in the life of Sakyamuni. It has been translated into English by Duroiselle.

6. *The Legend of the Burmese Buddha*. This Legend is found in its English translation in a two volume work by Bigandet. The

¹⁵See Rhys Davids Preface to the "Fo Sho Hing Tsan King" in *S. B. E.*

¹⁶Saunders gives the date as the 12th century A. D. but the author as Buddalatta. See *Gotama Buddha*, p. 3.

account which it gives covers the same main ground, but is evidently influenced by an alien environment,—quite different from that of the Indian and Sinhalese records. The constant presence of “Nats” or spirits, sometimes malevolent, sometimes benevolent, but always present, is a striking feature of this account. Historically it is of little value, though it has interest for purposes of comparison.

In attempting to evaluate the sources available to us, it will be necessary to follow some standard. We cannot accept all the accounts of the life of Buddha as of equal historical value. Some represent a very early tradition, some a period many centuries later. Other things being equal, the earlier traditions will be of greater value, as representing a time nearer the actual event. It will also be necessary to give a wide margin for the oriental imagination in the picturing of scenes. Historic accuracy in recording what took place is scarcely to be expected. Neither however can a tradition be dismissed summarily because it contains improbable details. Very much of ancient history would have to be given up were this method applied. If we are to try to find the core of fact beneath the overgrowth of fiction, we too must exercise a little imagination, and seek to find, as nearly as we can from the accounts, what actually did happen, in the life of the Buddha.

Such a quest is by no means an unworthy one. Next to Jesus Himself, there has perhaps been no figure in history who has been so great a source of inspiration to countless millions of men right down through the ages, as has this earnest seeker after truth, who left all that most men hold dear, and with nothing but his begging bowl and a few rags, trod the pathway of suffering and shame, that he might find a way of peace for mankind. Any light which helps us to understand how he lived, and the source of his wonderful power, in his own soul and over the minds and affections of men, will well repay our search.