

BUDDHA'S LAST MEAL AND THE CHRISTIAN EUCHARIST.

THEIR PRESERVATION OF EARLIER RITES.

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WHILE we would draw no parallel between Buddha's Last Meal and the Christian Eucharist such as we should draw between the Angelic Heralds of Luke and those of the Sutta-Nipâto, yet these meals have something in common. It is this: they both preserve primeval sacred ideas about eating and drinking. Henry Clay Trumbull's monograph *The Blood Covenant* has set forth the ancient practice underlying the Christian sacrament, viz., the exchange of blood to cement friendship,—the blood, by a later refinement of the race, being represented by wine. The text of Mark, which is the oldest, has for the memorial words:

“And as they were eating, he took bread, and when he had blessed, he brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take ye: this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my *blood of the covenant*,¹ which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark xiv. 22-25.)

But Paul was not content with this simple form, and a vision from the risen Christ informed him that the memorial words commanded a perpetuity for the rite:

“I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.” (1 Cor. xi. 23-27.)

¹The words in italics are from Exodus xxiv. 8.

This new formula, with its mysterious threat, affiliated the Sacred Meal to those of Eleusis and of Mithra, much to the scandal of Justin Martyr, who saw in the latter a diabolic travesty. Thus did Christianity perpetuate a primeval rite, inherited by several of the book-religions from the prehistoric past. But Gospel authority was wanting until Paul's new words were inserted into the text of Luke :

“ And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer : for I say unto you, I will not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he received a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves : for I say unto you, I will not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave to them, saying, This is my body [*which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you*]. But behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. For the Son of man indeed goeth, as it hath been determined : but woe unto that man through whom he is betrayed ! And they began to question among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing.” (Luke xxii. 14-23.)

The Revised Version of 1881 (which I always use) notes in the margin that the words italicised and in brackets are not in certain manuscripts. The best critics consider them an addition made from Paul. Luke was reckoned by the early Christians as Paul's Gospel. Tertullian gives us their literary standard when he says that the works of disciples are counted those of their masters.

Just as the Christian Eucharist preserves the covenant blood of Exodus, derived from a remoter past, so does the Buddhist final meal preserve an equally ancient practice. In the Book of the Great Decease we read :

“ Now the Lord addressed Cundo the smith and said : ‘ Whatever dried boar's flesh remains to thee, Cundo, that bury in a hole. I see no one, Cundo, upon earth nor in the heavens of Mâro or Brahmâ, no one among philosophers and Brahmins, princes and peoples, by whom, when he has eaten it, that food can be assimilated, save by the Tathâgato.’

“ ‘ Even so, Master !’ said Cundo the smith in assent unto the Lord. And whatever dried boar's flesh remained over, that he buried in a hole.” (Book of the Great Decease, Chap. IV.)

Now James G. Frazer, in his remarkable book *The Golden Bough*, tells us this :

“ No one may touch the food which the King of Loango leaves upon his plate: it is buried in a hole in the ground.” (*Golden Bough*, second edition. London, 1900, Vol. I., p. 318.)

This is done to prevent the scraps being used by a sorcerer, but it is also part and parcel of the whole system of royal and priestly taboos, such as seen in the former seclusion of the Mikado. As is well known to students of historical religion, the offices of priest and king were once identical, as in the case of Melchizedek. The primitive royal hierarch was a deity on earth, and the spiritual ancestor of

“That divinity which doth hedge a king.”

The supreme example of the divine or priestly king is the God-Man; and the race-consciousness of both the great historic Masters led them to identify themselves with this mythic Divine-Human. Greater than any parallels in their conduct from an alleged connection between their stories is the older and more venerable one which has its roots in the hero-legends of primeval man.