

THE WIDOW'S TWO MITES.

BY THE EDITOR.

WE find in the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter xxi. 1-4, the story of the two mites of the widow, which in its simple beauty reads as follows :

"And he looked up, and he saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

"And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

"And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all :

"For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God : but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

Mark preserves the same story almost literally in the same form, in Chapter xii., 42, and we may fairly assume that the latter has taken it from the former, that the passage in Luke is the original and that it has been inserted by later copyists from the Gospel of Luke. Albert J. Edmunds has proved that the Gospel of Luke is full of parallels to Buddhist scriptures, and the story of the two mites is one of the most striking accounts having an analogous story in Buddhist literature. Mark is the older Gospel, and the frame-work of Mark can be traced back to an account of a life of Jesus which may be based on reminiscences of an eye-witness. This oldest part of Mark, commonly called by German scholars *Urmarkus* (i. e., original Mark), was utilised also by the authors of the other synoptic Gospels, Luke and Matthew ; accordingly, it is probable that if the original Mark had contained the story of the two mites it would have found its way also into the Gospel according to Matthew.

We know that the institutions of the Jewish temple were not based upon a system of voluntary donations except when sacrifices were made to the temple at Jerusalem. The priesthood was maintained by tithes, that is the tenth of the harvest's yield and other definitely prescribed taxes ; and we know nothing of charitable con-

tributions in the house of God, which have become customary only in Christian churches among the Gentiles. The Ebionites, the Nazarenes, and other sects of Judea were in the habit of receiving alms, but their institutions were decidedly un-Jewish, and the members of the Nazarene sect, as we know from the passages in the Acts of the Apostles, had to surrender their entire wealth on entering the congregation,—a statement which (on the supposition that the Nazarenes are identical with or similar to the Essenes) is fully borne out by the testimony of Philo, Josephus, Pliny, and Tacitus.

Matters were different among the Buddhists. The Buddhist sangha is entirely maintained by voluntary offerings, and the institution of making offerings is well established since the foundation of Buddhism. This speaks in favor of a Buddhist origin of the story.

It is noteworthy that the Buddhist story of the two mites presents an exact parallel, even to the coincidence that the poor woman deposits two mites, that is, two copper pence, and that she gives all that she has, all her living.

We know the Buddhist version of the story through Aṅva-ghosha, a Buddhist saint and philosopher who flourished in the first century of the Christian era, and his tale is obviously second-hand. It lacks the classical simplicity of the Gospel version and reads in Samuel Beal's translation as follows :

" I heard that there was once a lone woman who, having gone to the mountain *Chau-ngan* (day-dull), beheld the men on the mountain holding a religious assembly called the Paochavarsha pārīshat.¹ Then the woman, having begged some food in the crowd, beholding the priests, was filled with joy, and uttering her praises, said, 'It is well, holy priests! but whilst others give precious things such as the ocean caves produce, I a pauper have nothing to give.' Having spoken thus and searched herself in vain for something to give, she recollected that some time before she had found in a dung-heap two mites (copper mites), so taking these forthwith she offered them as a gift to the priesthood in charity. At this time the president (Sthavira), who had arrived at the condition of a Saint (Rahat), and so could read the motives (heart) of men, disregarding the rich gifts of others and beholding the deep principle of faith dwelling in the heart of this poor woman, and wishing the priesthood to esteem rightly her religious merit, [at once and] without waiting to take up his lute, with full voice burst forth with the following canto, as he raised his right hand and said, 'Reverend priests attend!' and then he proceeded :

" ' The mighty earth and vast ocean,
 Whatever treasures they contain,
 According to this woman's intention
 Are all bestowed in charity on the priesthood.

¹ That is, a quinquennial assembly.

With careful mind and pious consideration,
 Practising herself in the discharge of good works,
 She has reached the goal of deliverance,
 And utterly put away all covetous and selfish aims.'

"At this time the woman was mightily strengthened in her mind as she thought, 'It is even as the Teacher says, what I do is as difficult as for him who gives up all his treasures'; and then, exulting in the act although sorrowing on account of her poverty, she prostrated herself before the priests and offered her two mites to the president, weeping as she did so and cast down in heart, and then she recited the following lines :

" ' May I through all successive births
 Escape such poverty as now afflicts me !
 Enjoying for ever such happiness (as plenty brings),
 With friends and relations in equal condition.
 I now offer in charity priestly-fruit,
 May Buddha rightly discern (my aim) ;
 And as the result of this religious act,
 May I soon obtain answer to my prayer.
 The good and pious intention of my heart,
 May it result soon in outward prosperity.'

"Then the woman having left the mountain, sat down beneath a tree, whilst a cloud canopy above her sheltered her without intermission from the sun.

"Now at this time the king of the country, having just performed the funeral obsequies of the queen, was walking abroad to see the country, when observing the cloud canopy, he went to the tree over which it rested, and there seeing the woman, his mind was filled with love."

We are further told that the King took the poor woman to his palace where he bestowed upon her gifts, and placed her in authority as his chief wife.

This story of the poor woman and her two mites is too similar to the Gospel story not to be historically connected. Being a pauper she happens to come in possession of two mites and she offers them to the sangha (the Church). Her gift is regarded as more than the donations of rich people who give only a part of their abundance.

Now, the Buddhist story of the two mites happens to be one the date of which can be fixed with certainty before the year 62 of the Christian era. Beal's translation is made from the Chinese, which was translated by 'An-shai-ko, a doctor of the law, during the later Han dynasty, which ruled China in the second century of the Christian era. Buddhist books were imported in 62 by Ming Ti (who reigned 58-76), and we know that Aṣvaghosha's books were among them. Aṣvaghosha is known to have been a contemporary of Christ, and he was an old man at the time when King Kanishka

conquered Magadha. King Kanishka of Kashmir ascended the throne in 78. He was a Buddhist, and having conquered the King of Magadha (so we read in Hsüen Tsang's report) made peace with him on condition that he should surrender the begging-bowl of Buddha (one of the most sacred relics of Buddhism), and also the most famous Buddhist preacher, Aṣvaghosha. Aṣvaghosha was at that time so far advanced in years that (according to the Thibetan historian Târanâtha) he asked King Kanishka's permission to stay at home; according to Kumârajiva, however, he finally took up his abode in Kashmir.

Thus, we may be sure beyond any doubt that the Buddhist story of the two mites was written in India by a man who was either a contemporary of Christ or was born not much later than 10 A. D. Since it is not probable that the Gospel story of the two mites would have travelled so quickly from Palestine to India, the Buddhist origin of the tale seems pretty well established.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the Christian Gospel story preserves an older version of the tale of the two mites; it is simpler and more dignified. The Buddhist story, in the form in which Aṣvaghosha cast it, has suffered by priestly perversion. We may be sure that the Buddhist story, as reprinted above from Beal's translation, presupposes the existence of a simpler account, which must have been the same as, or quite similar to, the account of Luke. Aṣvaghosha, a Buddhist preacher, utilises the story to impress the Buddhist laymen with the importance of bestowing gifts upon the sangha, the Buddhist Church; and in order to prove to his hearers that the poor woman was richly rewarded for her gift he completes the narrative in a very worldly fashion. That is not the way in which Buddha himself would have told the story, but it is quite natural in the time of Buddhist ecclesiasticism. Aṣvaghosha tells how the poor woman was rewarded by meeting the King, and finally becoming his queen. In a similar way, the Gospel story might have been spun out in the Middle Ages during the time of Christian ecclesiasticism by some monkish poet whose tendency would have been to impress his readers with the importance of making rich endowments to monasteries, and that to give all one's possessions would bring rich rewards.

While we thus grant that Aṣvaghosha's account is a perverted version of the story, it seems highly improbable that the Christian account should be the original; and we would rather believe that the original Buddhist account which is either unknown to us or

lost, found its way East through the channels by which so many other Buddhist ideas found their way into the New Testament.

Prof. Samuel Beal believes that the similarities between Christianity and Buddhism must be explained by the fact that Buddhism absorbed Christian ideas, and his theory how at such an early date Christian doctrines could have been transmitted to India is based on his identification of the Essenes with Buddhists.

The Essenes are a well-known sect, spoken of by Josephus, Philo, and Pliny. They were, in their mode of life and general institutions, very similar to the Therapeutæ of Egypt; and it is more than probable that the Nazarenes and Ebionites were either the same sect or affiliated to the Essene community, or sects that were similar in spirit and born of the same tendencies of the age.

Professor Beal enumerates all the similarities between the Buddhists and the Essenes; and since the subject has been repeatedly discussed there is no need of repeating his arguments. As to their keeping the Sabbath with great rigidity, M. Prideaux observes that the Essenes must have been Jews, but even here Professor Beal finds a similarity with the Buddhists. He says:

"With respect, however, to this we may remark that 'the Buddhist Sabbath was a day of religious observance and celebration for laymen and priests, and occurred four times in every month. On these days religious laymen (i. e., *white-clothed men*)¹ dress in their best, and abstain from all trade and worldly amusements."²

As to their name, Professor Beal says:

"There is no improbability in supposing that their name, which is either 'Essenes' or 'Essaioi,' is derived from the word *Isi*, gen. *isino*, plural *isi* or *isayo*. The meaning of *isi* is a 'saint' or 'holy man,' which meaning agrees with Philo's derivation from the Greek *ἅγιος*, a word probably connected with the same root.

"The Magadhî or Prakrit *Isi* is the Sanscrit *Rishi*, and this, with the addition of Maha (making a compound *Mahesi*, i. e., the Great Saint), was a not infrequent epithet of Buddha.

"It is a mistake to suppose that because the name '*Buddha*' is not met with in the West, therefore the doctrines of Buddhism were not known.

"'*Buddha*' is a term descriptive of the great teacher's character as 'the enlightened one' (*ὁ πεφωτισμενος*), or 'the awakened,' and was no personal appellation.

"Even on the stone-cut edicts of Asoka this epithet occurs but once.

"But as 'the saint' or 'great saint,' he was not uncommonly known, and his followers were also described as '*isayo*' or '*isi*-(*you*).'"³

¹In the Syrian monument discovered in China the Syrian Christian students are called *white-clothed*.

²Vide Childers' Pāli Dict., *sub voce* "Uposatho."

³Vide Oldenberg in his *Vinaya Pitaka*, in which this title is given to Buddha. Vide Index, Cullavagga, p. 339; and Childers states (Pāli Dict., *sub voce*), that "Buddhas and Arahās are called *isi*."

Professor Beal identifies the Essenes with the Buddhist laymen called Upasakas. He asks:

"Were the Essenes, then, a congregation of lay people corresponding with the Buddhist Upāsakas? The Upasakas were under vows of chastity, etc., but not so completely as the Bhikshus. A Bhikshu or full Buddhist monk was forbidden to labor in the field, but the Upasaka was not, the Bhikshu again wore yellow robes, the Upasaka wore white garments; the general name for eminent sages or saints (not Bhikshus) was *isayo* (Fausböll, *Sutta Nipata*, p. 48), the plural form of *isi*. Another plural form was *isi*; these two agree with the Greek variants 'Essouin and Essouoi."

In comment on the report of Josephus, Professor Beal explains his views as follows:¹

"Josephus remarks 'that the Essenes hold marriage in no esteem, but yet do not absolutely oppose it.'

"1. So the Upāsakas (Buddhist laymen) were not forbidden to marry, but yet marriage was allowed only as a degree of holiness next below 'entire continency.'

"2. 'Riches held in contempt; community of goods maintained.' This is a distinctive mark of the Buddhist lay-disciple. The great Asoka gave all his goods to the Church, and encouraged the discipline of the Samgha, which required 'all goods to be held in commoo.' Besides which, there is no direction so frequently found in Buddhist writings as 'the duty of self-sacrifice and charity.'

"3. 'They make no use of oil.' This is a literal order found in the Buddhist community

"4. 'They go habited in white garments.'" The Upāsakas throughout the Vinaya Pitaka are described as the 'white-clad.'²

"5. They have stewards, etc. This is the duty of the Buddhist *Karmadāna*, who takes the general management of the secular affairs of the convent.

"6. 'They give reception to all travellers of their sect, and neither sell nor buy.' This also is literally the case with Buddhists, even to the present day, inasmuch that their monasteries are still used as 'places for hospitality, where food is given without any charge.'

"7. With respect to the prayers of the Essenes before sunrise and at sunset, this is a rule of their order, as we are expressly told by I-Tsing. And in Mr. Dickson's translation of the *Patimokkam*, we have the words given us which the Buddhists use at grace

"The rules of the Essenes respecting the age of the members, the existence of novices, and the cause of expulsion, are all perfectly Buddhist."

Now, Professor Beal sums up his arguments by saying:

"If we accepted the theory that the Essenes were connected with Buddhism, this would be sufficient to account for the presence of these parallel records or no-

¹ For further information, Professor Beal refers to Dr. Lightfoot's *Epistles of St. Paul, Colossians, and Philemon*, Excorsos i. ii., iii., Note 2, p. 394. Dr. Lightfoot there explains the name Σραμνοχρηγας to be the Sanscrit *Sramanācharja*, which is obviously correct.

² There is also a well-known image of a female, with a child on her knee, common among Chinese Buddhists, and also known in India, as it is mentioned by I-Tsing in his account of Indian temples, and which is described as the "white-clad Kwan-yin," because she grants the request of the female lay-disciples that they may have children.

tices in the books of Northern Buddhism. The intercourse of Bactrian Greeks or Hellenists with Syria, and probably Samaria, where Alexander the Great had left a Macedonian colony, would be sufficient to account for it. To me, indeed, it appears most singular that the saying of Christ with respect to the woman who anointed him for his burying—if she be the same who wept at his feet, as is generally supposed—should be verified under a somewhat different form in the record of the tender woman who wept at Buddha's feet at the time of his death. It would seem as though the story were adopted and perverted by the Buddhists.¹ So also with respect to the Samaritan woman; there are now before me *three* versions of a story bearing marked likeness to this narrative, in the Chinese Tripiṭaka. These stories were brought to China by missionaries (Buddhist missionaries, I mean) from the West, and there translated. Now, it seems to me not an unreasonable surmise that those people of Sychar who were 'clothed in white' were Essenes. And if the Essenes were connected with Buddhists, the story might well have been carried away by some traveller or brother from a distant clime, and so become known in Parthia and North India."

Among minor coincidences, Beal mentions also that in both religions, Buddhism and Christianity, the danger of riches is inculcated. Aṣvaghosha, in his sermons, recites a long poem, probably of his own making, in which a Brahman is converted by understanding how little the pleasure is of enjoyment in comparison to the bliss (sweet dew) to be partaken of by the attainment of Nirvâna. Aṣvaghosha says:

"The case is so with wealthy folk,
 Who now enjoy their luxuries, but in the end are born in hell.
 In hell, whose very walls
 And every corner, nay, the very earth, is molten fire.
 The sinner there lies writhing;
 The fire bursts from out his body
 While he receives unmitigated torments.
 Consider, then, and weigh the matter.
 The joys to be partaken of, how few!
 The pain and suffering, how great!"

Professor Beal then assumes that the Essene brethren came directly into contact with Aṣvaghosha. He says:

"Among the distinguished Buddhists who lived about the time of Kanishka (the Indo-Scythian conqueror of North India), the twelfth Buddhist patriarch, Aṣvaghosha, was not the least so. It is now tolerably certain² that Kanishka's reign began about 78 A. D. It is not strange, then, if we find in Aṣvaghosha's writings many allusions and illustrations derived apparently from foreign, and perhaps Christian, sources. To me, indeed, it appears, if the date above named be

¹ This supposes, of course, that the copy of the Chinese Vinaya Pitaka in which the account of this woman is found, was put together after the Christian era. May we refer this, and other books, to the council held under Kanishka?

² Compare Fergussen's *Saka, Samvat, and Gupta Eras*, with Dr. Oldenberg in the *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*, Vol. VIII.

the true one, that much in the Buddhist development coming under the name of the Greater Vehicle may be explained on this ground.

"Altogether, having translated the Buddhacharita throughout, and also the greater portion of Açvaghosha's sermons, I am impressed with the conviction that Christian teaching had reached his ears at the time when Açvaghosha was in Parthia, or at any rate in Bactria (viz., about A. D. 70), and that he was influenced by it so far as to introduce into Buddhism the changes we find beginning to take shape at this period."

Professor Beal seems little acquainted with Pâli literature, for he calls the idea of "universal salvation," and the doctrines of Buddha's incarnation by the descent of the spirit, and of the power of the bhodî or wisdom by which we are made "sons" or converted "disciples" un-Buddhistic. The latter, it is true, are characteristic developments of the Mahâyâna, but the former, and also the idea of sonship, date back to Buddha himself. Beal claims that :

"There was such an intercommunication at this time between East and West as shaped the later school of Buddhism into a pseudo-Christian form; and this accounts very much for some otherwise inexplicable similarities."

Now it may be regarded as historical that Açvaghosha lived in Kashmir, but that he reached Bactria or even Parthia is (so far as we know) nowhere mentioned.

Thus it is barely possible that Açvaghosha may have received accounts from his Buddhist brethren in distant Palestine; it is barely possible, but that is all that can be said in favor of Professor Beal's interpretation of the facts before him. And we must consider that in 78 Açvaghosha was an old man. He had written the books (especially the Buddhacharita, the life of Buddha) that had made him famous and we cannot assume that at this most advanced stage of his career, he should have introduced all those changes into his religion which made Buddhism so very much like Christianity.

Does it not seem much more probable that the story of the two mites and other narratives common to Christianity and Buddhism are older than the Mahâyâna? And assuredly, the connections between the Orient and Occident which become now better and better known to us, go far to prove that Christian doctrines were formed in Judæa under the influence of older religions among which Buddhism, Parseeism, and Hellenism are of special importance.

Christian influence upon later Buddhism especially through the Nestorians in Thibet and China cannot be denied, and thus many similarities between the Roman Catholic ritual and the Lama-

ist institutions must be regarded as Christian importations; but the many parallels between the ancient Pâli texts and the Gospel traditions especially the parables cannot be explained in the same way, and I do not see how we can escape the inference of their Buddhist origin. We must consider that at any rate, whether or not incidental stories have been derived by Buddhism from Christianity or *vice versa*, the main doctrines of a universal loving-kindness, of forbearance towards enemies, etc., etc., are unequivocally as old as Buddha himself who lived in the fifth century before Christ.