

INDONESIAN LEGEND OF NABI ISA.

A STRAY CHRISTIAN ECHO AMONG NON-CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

BY THE EDITOR.

STORIES travel from place to place and the exchange of thought among different nations has since time immemorial been much more lively than was formerly assumed. We know that the Buddhist Jataka tales, which are childhood stories of the Buddha, traveled from India to Greece where they reappeared as Æsop's fables, and so the story of the Bodhisattva who became Buddha was retold in Christian countries where Bodhisat was changed to Josaphat, under which name he was made a saint of the Catholic Church.

But Christian stories also traveled into Buddhist countries, although the traces of the influence of Christianity were mainly obliterated just as the name of Buddhism has disappeared in the West, leaving only dim echoes, but we know that Nestorian Christianity was an established religion in Tibet and that more than one thousand years ago it was a religion officially recognized by the Chinese government. The Nestorian monument, one of the oldest Christian monuments in existence, was written in the Chinese language and recapitulates the main tenets of Christianity, still testifying to the pristine glory of Christianity in China. It stands in a country where now the people and the government are so vigorously opposed to Christianity that all missionary efforts seem hopeless. But echoes of Christianity have also reached the East Indian Archipelago, and it is strange to find a story of the prophet Jesus retold in the style of the Buddhist Jatakas, which has reached the island of Java not through Europeans but through natives. The Dutch masters of Java do not neglect the intellectual traces that can be discovered among the natives. They have carefully investigated and described the temple ruins of Borobudur, but have also studied the languages

and dialects of the country of which there are not less than fifteen, and have collected the literature of the Javanese.

We find among a collection of Indonesian folk stories translated by T. J. Bezemer, professor at the School of Forestry in Wageningen, a story which is entitled "A Legend of Nabi Isa," which means the "prophet Jesus." The very form of the name indicates that the story comes from Syria and was originally told by Semites who are in the habit of calling a religious man a prophet or *Nabi*, and "Isa" is the common form of "Jesus" in Western Asia. The story itself attributes to Jesus the character of a man who in his quiet wisdom and perfect goodness deals justly with other people while they suffer by their own avarice and egoism. We need not point out the resemblance of the character of Jesus to that of Buddha, nor that the story reminds us also of the folk legends of southern Germany. They appear like repetitions of ancient pagan tales, in which some god, be it Thor among the Teutons or Krishna among the Hindus, walks on earth and sets the people an example of righteousness and kindness.

This story did not reach Java through Europeans and missionaries. It must have been told and retold by natives of Syria, India, and Java, and became naturalized among the islanders. Our author, Professor Bezemer, discovered it there among other stories of Indonesian lore, and included it in his volume of *Volksdichtung aus Indonesien* (The Hague, 1904).

A LEGEND OF NABI ISA.*

When Nabi Isa was traveling around the country to proclaim his religion there came a man to him who said, "Lord Nabi Isa! I wish very much to become thy disciple and follower." Then Nabi Isa answered him, "Very well!" and they went on their way together.

Nabi Isa had three loaves of bread which he had taken along as provisions for the journey, and these he gave to his newly acquired disciple to carry.

When they came to the bank of a river Nabi Isa said, "Let us first rest a little while and eat the loaves. I will divide them. One I shall eat myself and one is for thee. The third thou shalt take care of until I am hungry again." These words filled the disciple with great joy.

Afterwards Nabi Isa went to the river to quench his thirst. When after a short time he returned to his follower the latter in-

* Translated from the German of T. J. Bezemer by Lydia G. Robinson.

formed him that one of the loaves was lost. Nabi Isa listened in silence and asked for no further particulars. Later on as they were wandering in the forest they saw a hind with two fawns. Nabi Isa called one of the fawns to him, and the little thing came at once. He slew it and roasted the flesh in order to partake of it with his disciple. A little was left, and when he had pronounced a charm over it the animal came to life again through the power of God and ran after its mother.

Now Nabi Isa continued his journey with his disciple into another city where he saw hundreds of cows. He bade his disciple seize one of them. He then slew the cow and roasted the meat, and when it was finished they enjoyed it together. Soon, however, the owner of the cow came up with a great crowd of other men to seize Nabi Isa and his disciple, because it was thought that they had stolen the cow. Nabi Isa at once addressed the remnant of meat, "Live again through the power of God, and arise." The cow came back to life and joined the other cattle. The owner and his companions were greatly astonished and said, "These two holy men are extraordinarily versed in the arts of witchcraft."

Now they came to a sandy plain where they stopped a while. Nabi Isa took a little of the earth which was mixed with sand, and divided it into three small piles, to which he said, "O Sand, through the power of God be changed into gold," and it happened according to his words.

Then spake Nabi Isa to his disciple, "I will divide this gold into three little piles. One part is for me, one part is for thee, and the third part is for the one who ate the lost bread."

When the disciple heard this he said very submissively, "O Lord Nabi Isa, now will I honestly confess that it was I who ate the missing loaf."

"Very well," answered Nabi Isa, "take this share of gold, and my share too I give thee, but at the same time I dismiss thee from my service. Follow me no longer."

So Nabi Isa went away from that place and left the disciple behind with his gold. The latter now wished to sell it in order to obtain provisions for his wife and children. But not long afterwards two Bedouins came up with drawn swords and said to him, "O thou beggar of a monk, these three piles of gold certainly do not belong to thee. Whence hast thou stolen them?"

The disciple answered, "I swear unto you that this gold came from Nabi Isa who gave it to me, his follower." But the Bedouins answered him fiercely, "We do not believe what thou sayest. Thou

hast certainly stolen this gold, and for that deed we shall cut thy throat."

Then the disciple said, "O Bedouins, I beseech you let us divide this gold among the three of us."

The Bedouins answered, "Well then, we will accept this proposal." Then because they were very hungry they said to him, "But listen friend, thou must take a little of this gold and exchange it for bread in some *desa* where it can be had."

The disciple was greatly pleased at this and went at once into the next village taking a little of the gold with him to buy bread. But on the way he said to himself, "After I have bought the bread I will put poison in it, and when the Bedouins have died from it the gold will again be mine." Meanwhile the Bedouins had agreed between themselves that when the disciple came back with the bread they would cut his throat and then divide the gold between them.

About an hour later the disciple came back bringing two poisoned loaves of bread with him. Hardly had he handed it to the Bedouins when one of them drew a sword and cut off his head. Then they began to eat the poisoned bread, but had barely finished it when they fell over and lay by the side of the disciple, three corpses together.

On the following morning Nabi Isa came by with a large company of disciples. When he saw the three corpses lying there he said to his followers, "Behold the gold! It has become the destruction of all these men who were led astray by avarice. Therefore, my disciples, always bear in mind these warnings:

1. Pray to God and honor Him as the Lord who made Heaven and Earth.

2. Be content with that which the Lord has given you.

3. Give alms, food, and clothing to the pious needy ones who beg in the temple.

4. Work for the embellishment of the temple, and give mead and oil for its use. So will the Lord God reward you with good fortune in this world and in the next."