

THE BUDDHIST ORIGIN OF LUKE'S PENITENT THIEF.

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Motto: Both religions independent in the main, but out of eighty-nine chapters in the Gospels, the equivalent of one, mostly in Luke, is colored by a knowledge of Buddhism.

IT is a canon of Gospel criticism that Matthew and Luke are copying Mark in the body of their narrative. When they depart from him they do so with a motive. Then how do we account for this?

Mark xv. 27, 32.

“And with him they crucify two robbers: one on his right hand, and one on his left. . . . *And they that were crucified with him reproached him.*”

Luke, xxiii. 33, 39-43.

“There they crucified him, and the malefactors: one on the right hand and the other on the left. . . . And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, Art thou not the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

Matthew supports Mark, so that the contradiction is complete. John is silent about the reproaching, but he is outside the Synoptic tradition. Robinson Smith and other scholars have abundantly shown how Luke alters this tradition to suit himself. Thus,

it is his contention that all the resurrection apparitions were seen in or around Jerusalem; he leaves no room for Markan appearances in Galilee. The apostles are commanded to stay in the capital till Pentecost. (Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 4.) Consequently, when Mark records a double command to go into Galilee and meet the risen Lord (Mark xiv. 28; xvi. 7), Luke reduces this to a mere echo thus:

Mark xvi. 6, 7.

He is risen: he is not here.
Go, tell his disciples and Peter, He
goeth before you *into Galilee*; there
shall ye see him, *as he said unto you.*

Luke xxiv. 6, 7.

He is not here, but is risen. Re-
member *how he spake unto you* when
he was yet *in Galilee*, saying that the
Son of Man must be delivered up
into the hands of sinful men.

Luke's words "in Galilee" are a mere echo of the text of Mark which Luke has before him, but the sense is utterly changed to agree with his notion about the metropolitan exclusiveness of the resurrection:

Luke xxiv. 49. "Tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high."

Acts i. 4, 5. "He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which [said he], ye heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

Thus we see how Luke alters the text of Mark with a motive. This is a canon of criticism now agreed upon by all historical critics. It remains to apply it. The motive in the case just discussed is sufficiently plain. But what is the motive for the penitent thief? Why does Luke violate the text of his master Mark who tells us that both the malefactors reviled the Lord? Hitherto no motive could be found, beyond the general one of love and forgiveness. This has been because New Testament scholars have been imbued with the Mediterranean culture. Greece, Rome and Judea were their three classic nations and the rest of the world was a mist. But we now know that at the time of Christ India was one of the four great powers of the earth and was the apostle of a world-religion which was knocking at the gates of Antioch, the great international metropolis where the Gospel of Luke was composed. Luke was an Antioch physician, and as a physician he had to know something about India, which was one of the homes of ancient medical knowledge. His city was an emporium for the Chinese silk-trade, and an ancient work on geography assures us that a long line of hotels connected it with India. Along this great

caravan route there circulated the coins of Kanishka, an Indo-Scythian potentate whose date is now being debated by scholars. Some put him in the first century B. C., others in the first century A. D. Upon several of his coins can still be seen the image of Buddha with his name in Greek letters:

BOΔΔO.

Upon the coins of Kanishka's predecessors and successors we read Buddhist names and titles, both in Greek and Pali.



COINS OF KING KANISHKA.*

Both coins show King Kanishka on the obverse and the Buddha on the reverse. The upper coin is of copper, the lower one of gold.

Now it is practically certain that Luke, who wrote in the nineties, had seen these coins and, being a student of religion, had inquired who this Buddha was. Travelers were quick to tell him that India, Bactria and the eastern part of the Parthian Empire were covered with his temples. Upon these temples were sculptured the scenes of Buddha's life, and one of the leading characters portrayed was a penitent robber. The Great Chronicle of Ceylon expressly says

* Reproduced from *The Buddhist Review*, July, 1909. After the official catalogue of the British Museum.

that this character was graven on the famous Great Tope at the island capital in the second century before Christ. Among the delegates from Buddhist countries who came to the opening ceremony was a company "from Alexandria, the city of the Greeks." This is the regular term among ancient Hindu astronomers for the capital of Egypt, but even if another Alexandria be meant, the story of the Buddha was known to the Greek world. Not only so, but we have discovered, during the present decade of this twentieth century, that at the time of Christ the Buddhist scriptures were being translated into the vernaculars of the Parthian Empire, the buffer state between Palestine and India. Strabo says that at this period nearly the same language pervaded Media and parts of Persia, Bactria and Sogdiana. We have now found considerable portions of the Buddhist scriptures in Sogdian. The Christian Gospels were translated into the same language about the ninth century, but before that the same language had been the vehicle of Manichean and Buddhist holy books, with Buddhist first.¹ The Wei Annals of China tell us that in B. C. 2 a Chinese official was presented with Buddhist scriptures *in a vernacular translation* at the hands of the very nation whose king Kanishka was.² If this vernacular was not Sogdian, it was probably Tokharish, in which also we have found fragments of Buddhist literature and can even identify them in the extant Pali canon.³ Tokharish was spoken in Bactria (Afghanistan) and Alexander Polyhistor tells us that in the first century B. C. that country was full of Buddhist topes. Asoka's inscriptions and the Ceylon Chronicles explain this by saying that Buddhist missionaries were sent thither about 250 B. C. From the fact that Greek and Pali appear on the same coins, we are entitled to infer that the missionaries translated their scriptures not only into Tokharish, but also into Greek. However, we will not press this point, as no remains have yet been found, and Greek was dying out in that part of Asia at the time of Christ.

But from what we do know, we can clearly see that the great Gentile Evangelist has sufficient motive for his penitent thief. The Fathers are unanimous in declaring that his Gospel was Paul's, and Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles. When therefore the evangelist found himself confronted all over Asia (for during his lifetime Buddhism entered China) by a religion of love and forgiveness, he could not but be influenced thereby. The penitent

¹ Louis H. Gray, in *The Expository Times*, Edinburgh, November, 1913.

² Francke, in *Indian Antiquary*, 1906.

³ *Journal Asiatique*, since 1911.

thief of Buddhism was "Fingergarland" (Angulimālo) so named because he wore a necklace of human fingers. Buddha converted him with a few gentle words, and the king who had come at the head of an armed troop to arrest the highwayman was astonished. A meek-eyed Buddhist monk responded to his salutation. The story was many times translated into Chinese; the penitent robber is one of the psalmists in the book of Psalms of the Monks, wherein are assembled all the leading characters of primitive Buddhism, and there is no reasonable doubt that Parthian versions existed in Gospel times. And Parthians were present at the founding of the Christian religion (Acts ii. 9).

The great obstacles against the recognition of the hypothesis here maintained have been:

1. Our ignorance of the propaganda of Buddhism at the time of Christ;
2. Our objection to admit that Luke dealt in fiction.

But the discoveries in Chinese Turkestan by men like Pelliot and Stein have removed the first objection, and the articles of Robinson Smith and others have removed the second. The ground is therefore now clear for the recognition of the fact that our Gentile Evangelist expressly adapted his Gospel to the great world-religion of his age and continent.