

# 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.

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KING SIV'S SACRIFICE.

*Frontispiece to The Open Court.*

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## KING SIVT'S SACRIFICE.

THE STORY OF THE POUND OF FLESH IN ANCIENT INDIA.

BY THE EDITOR.

WHEN Alexander the Great entered India Greek and Indian civilization met for the first time with the result that a Hellenized kingdom known under the name of Gandhara originated in the Indus valley. The invaders were called Yavanas, which is the Indianized name of Ionians. The conquerors gradually adopted Indian habits and language, and Greek civilization amalgamated with Indian traditions. A Greek monarchy was established, and one of their kings (Milinda, whose Greek name was Meander) became converted to Buddhism. Milinda plays a considerable part in the history of Buddhist thought, and his conversion to Buddhism was celebrated in a Buddhist canonical book still extant which bears the title, *Questions of King Milinda*.

The Greek kings of Gandhara summoned Greek artists to represent Buddhist topics in the Greek manner, and characters and illustrations of Buddhist lore were worked out in an almost classical style. The lack of artistic technique was fully made up by the enthusiasm with which the novelty of the subject inspired the occidental converts to an oriental faith that appeared to them like a revelation, and this period in the history of Greco-Indian life establishes an epoch in the history of Buddhist art. Its works are known under the name of Gandhara sculptures and determine the later development of Buddhist art all over Asia. Buddha himself was portrayed after the Greek ideal of Apollo, with the result that even to-day Buddha figures bear occidental features, while the Arhats or Buddhist saints are more or less Asiatic in their appearance.

Among recent discoveries of Gandhara sculptures there is one which was discovered in the Swat valley in northwestern India, and is now preserved in the British Museum at London. We reproduce it as the frontispiece of this issue, from the February, 1913, number of the anthropological monthly, *Man*,<sup>1</sup> where it is accompanied by notes written by M. Longworth Dames and T. A. Joyce.

This relief pictures the story of King Sivi, and it is strange that we have here a religious tale which has made its round through several religions, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and possibly ends with a story told in occidental Christendom and finally utilized in English by Shakespeare in his drama of the "Merchant of Venice."

The style of the relief is typical of all Gandhara sculptures although it was not discovered at Gandhara itself, and we cannot positively say whether it represents the old Brahman story or its Buddhist version. The story must have been a favorite with the Indian population for it even received a Mohammedan version, and it is probably the source of the western story of that ideal friendship in which the merchant Antonio offers a pound of his flesh to save his friend Bassanio.

Glancing at the relief we see at the extreme left and seated under a baldachin a man suffering extreme pain, while another man is kneeling at his feet cutting off flesh from the calf of his left leg with a knife. The sufferer is King Sivi, and a woman is tenderly comforting him. His expression of pain and the sympathy of the woman, presumably his queen or one of the women of his harem, are admirably represented. The king's eyes are half closed and express submission to his fate. In the center of the picture stands a man with a balance like those used in ancient times. Under the chair of King Sivi sits a pigeon, and at the left of the head of the man who holds the balance something hovers in the air which can be recognized as the mutilated vestige of a flying bird, which can only represent the flying hawk mentioned in the story. At the right side of the man with the balance appears a deity holding a magic scepter called *vajra* in his left hand and indicating his attention to the weight by his raised right hand. He is adorned with a peculiar head-dress, and his divine authority is denoted by a halo around his head. Obviously he is Indra, known in the Jatakas as Sakka. By his side stands another personage with a nimbus, who in one of

<sup>1</sup> Published by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 50 Great Russell Street, London (American agents, G. E. Stechert & Company, of New York).

the versions of the story is called Visvakarman, an assistant to Sakka. He is another divinity of Indian mythology, corresponding to the Greek Hephaestos, the artificer of the gods, and the story, according to its oldest version in the Mahabharata (Book III, chapter 197), is as follows:

The gods resolved to test the virtue of King Sivi, so Agni assumed the shape of a pigeon and Indra the shape of a hawk. The latter pursued the former and the pigeon took refuge in the lap of the king, begging for protection. The pigeon claimed that he was a *rishi* learned in the Veda and of blameless life, whereas the hawk demanded the pigeon as his prey, claiming that it was the food which he needed for his hungry brood. The king, however, refused to deliver the pigeon, declaring that the gods would punish any one who gives up a frightened creature that seeks refuge from its enemies. To do full justice King Sivi offers the hawk a bull cooked with rice, in order to induce him to surrender his right to the pigeon. But the hawk replies, "O King, I do not ask for a bull or any other meat but this pigeon. He is my food to-day, ordained by the gods. Give him up to me." The king still refuses and asks the hawk what ransom will satisfy him, whereupon the hawk demands a piece of flesh from the king's leg equal to the weight of his quarry. Sivi accepts and has a piece of flesh cut from his right leg. But the pigeon proves too heavy. Piece after piece is sliced from other members of his body without being sufficient, until finally Sivi enters bodily into the scale. Thereupon the hawk disappears and the pigeon changes to his original form as the god Agni, praising the king for his virtue and bestowing upon him proper rewards.

There is no doubt that this is the story pictured in the Gandhara relief, and we possess a similar representation in the sculptures of the Amarawati tope which is also preserved in the British Museum, but some details differ because in this the king performs the operation upon himself with his sword. The pre-Buddhist character of the story is assured by King Sivi's first offer of a bull presupposing that the slaughter of a bull would not have been regarded as an evil deed, for according to Buddhist views this act would be small evidence of his fairness toward life in general.

The name of King Sivi occurs in the Jataka tales, which are accessible to English readers in the translation of Cowell and Rouse. In No. 499 of this edition we read a story of the "Great Being" born into the world as King Sivi. He had been noted for his generosity and almsgiving throughout the kingdom. He caused

six alms-halls to be erected and six hundred thousand pieces of money to be distributed daily. But he was not satisfied with giving only these external things, he wished to give something that was part of himself. He therefore made a vow that if any one would ask of him something which was part of himself he would give it at once, whether it were his heart, flesh from his body, his blood, the menial labor of his hands, or even his eyes. Sakka, in order to test him, appeared at the alms-hall in the guise of a blind Brahmin and there besought the king to give him one of his eyes so that each might have one. The king realized that his desire was to be fulfilled and in spite of the remonstrances of family, courtiers, people and the surgeon to whom he entrusted the task, he insisted on having first one eye removed and then the other as well. In giving them to the Brahmin he said: "The eye of omniscience is dearer than this eye a hundred fold, aye a thousand fold; there you have my reason for this action."

The king stayed at the palace a few days, but then handed over his kingdom to his courtiers and retired to a park where he could lead an ascetic's life. Then Sakka visited him and offered to grant him a boon, intending to give him back his eyes, but all this blind king would ask for was death. Then Sakka hinted at the restoration of his eyes, but King Sivi replied: "If you wish to give me an eye, Sakka, do not try any other means, but let my eye be restored as a consequence of my gift." Accordingly he received two eyes, but they were "neither natural nor divine" but were "called the eyes of Truth Absolute and Perfect." Sakka returned to the world of gods and the king to his palace. The great news of his recovery spread abroad and the people thronged around him bringing many gifts. He took advantage of the opportunity to impress upon them the importance of generosity and self-sacrifice. "O people of Sivi! now you have beheld these divine eyes, never eat food without giving something away!"

This story appears to be the reflection of a "Great Being" who like Buddha had acquired the honor of the title. The main virtue of the Indian people is charity to the very extreme of self-sacrifice.

Sivi seems to have been worshiped as the patron saint of the district where the tale bearing his name originated, and this was probably the territory known as Sibi or Sevi at the foot of the Bolan Pass and until modern times commonly known as Sivistan. Here is situated the celebrated shrine of Sakhi Sarwar, now a Moslem saint venerated by the inhabitants. Among the stories told of him there is one of a blind beggar to whom Ali presented a whole string



of camels because the bread for which he asked was packed in a bale on one of the camels in their midst. This sound like a Buddhist story, and our story of the hawk and the pigeon is also preserved in Balochi folklore. Mr. M. Longworth Dames took it down in Balochi verse in 1884 and published a translation of it in his *Popular Poetry of the Baloches* (London, 1907) where it reads as follows:

“A hawk and a harmless pigeon struggling together fell into the king’s lap, and the hawk first prayed for his help, saying, ‘Hail to thee, Ali, King of Men, thou art certainly the lord of our faith. I left my hungry brood on the bank of the Seven Streams on a deep-rooted tree, and have come swooping round that I may find somewhere some kind of game to take to my ravenous young ones. Thou knowest all; take not from me what I have hunted and caught.’ Then the pigeon made his petition. ‘Hail to thee, Ali, king of men, thou art the guardian of our faith. This is my tale: I left my hungry little ones on the slopes of Mount Bambor, and came here to pick up some grains of corn to carry to my starving children. I have been seized by this cruel hawk who has taken me to tear me open. Now give me not to this ravenous hawk, for thou knowest all that has happened.’

“He called his slave and said, ‘Kambar, bring me my knife.’ He laid his hand upon his thigh. ‘Come, hawk, I will give thee some flesh. Then he cut out as much of his own flesh as was equal to the weight of the pigeon, and even a little more. The harmless pigeon began to weep. ‘He is not a hawk, nor am I a pigeon; we are both angels of God whom he has sent to try thee, and well hast thou endured the test.’”

Other versions of the story appear in other Buddhist traditions. One is mentioned by Taranatha and alluded to by Hemachandra,<sup>2</sup> and it also appears in a Chinese translation of the Jatakas.<sup>3</sup> The notes in *Man* go on to state:

“The Chinese pilgrim Hiouen Tshang in the seventh century traveled through Udyana, that is the modern Swat, and there found a stupa built by King Asoka to commemorate the rescue of a pigeon from a hawk by the Bodhisattva, who, as King Sivika, cut flesh from his body to take the place of the pigeon (Stanislas Julien, *Voyages des Pélérins Bouddhistes*, Vol. I, p. 137). It seems prob-

<sup>2</sup> See S. d’Oldenburg in *Journ. Roy. As. Soc.*, 1893, pp 307-309.

<sup>3</sup> See *Abstract of Four Lectures*, by S. Beal. Compare also Beal’s *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, 125, note 20; and “Travels of Sung-yun” in the same work where the story is located near Gandhara. There we read: “Seven days’ journey thence the pilgrims arrived at the place where Sivikaraja delivered the dove.”

able that the stupa from which this relief comes may be that visited by the Chinese pilgrim."

The story is typical of Indian ideals. While western mind glories in deeds of heroism the Hindu's highest ideal is self-sacrifice. The sculpture before us is only one conspicuous instance of many others indicating the same tendency and illustrating the same ideal of highest virtue.

## THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA.

BY WILLIAM ALANSON BORDEN.

**A**LTHOUGH Christianity was preached in India as early as the sixth century, no results worthy of record were obtained in that land until a thousand years later, when the first Catholic mission was established in Goa.

Since then missionary endeavor in India has been continuous and equal success has attended the efforts of both Catholic and Protestant, if the term "success" can be applied to four centuries of work that has resulted in only three million converts out of a population of three hundred million.

To be sure, one per cent is better than nothing, but it is far below what we conceive to be the carrying power of our own faith.

In contrast with this meagre result, and the better to illustrate the point to be made: Some ten years ago a party of devout Hindus in Baroda State were moved to undertake a proselyting campaign among the hill tribes of the state, the only real heathen in India, and the census returns of 1911 show that thirty per cent of these tribes had been converted to Hinduism by these men, or four per cent of the whole population of the State of Baroda itself.

In one case four hundred years of conscientious attempt to convert a nation results in one per cent; in the other case ten years of work equally conscientious and carried on by men not more earnest results in four per cent. Why? Because Hinduism and Islam are more in the line of Oriental thought than Christianity is and, what is of equal importance, converts to Hinduism or Islam are not ostracized by their former communities.

The Christian missionary is an earnest, hardworking man, and a fairly capable one, who has achieved a small measure of success against tremendous odds. In the other case the odds are not as large and success has been attained in proportion.