

THE MAN IN THE WELL.

A PARABLE. TRANSLATED FROM A CHINESE SUTRA.

BY D. HAYASHI.

THUS I HAVE HEARD. Once upon a time Buddha was residing in the garden of Anatapindada at Jetavana in Sravasti, with a great number of bikshus. Among them there was the great Emperor Shoko, and Buddha addressed him :

“There is a parable which I will tell you, and you bethink deeply its meaning.

“In olden times a man was travelling through a wild prairie-land where he met a ferocious elephant. In his fear he ran away but the elephant pursued him hotly. On the way there was a deep well at the root of a tree, on which he climbed down to escape the danger ; but O horror ! he saw two rats, one white, the other black, gnawing at the root alternately ; and snakes on the four sides of the well threatened to bite the poor man with their poisonous fangs, while at the bottom of the well a large dragon was waiting to kill the suspended man with his sharp claws. And there was a hive in the root of the tree from which he sucked five drops of honey, and then the bees stung him. After this, the tree was burned by a fire which came from the prairie.”

When the Emperor heard this dreadful story, he asked the Buddha : “Why did that man undergo so much suffering, and how could he suck honey notwithstanding the evil consequences ?” Then the Buddha replied : “Great Emperor, this parable illustrates the fate of man. The wild prairie is our ignorance ; the man represents the condition of all living beings ; the elephant is the transiency of the world ; the well is the birth and death of man ; the tree root is life ; the white and the black rats are day and night ; their gnawing is the slow lapse of time ; the snakes on the four sides are the four

elements [viz., earth, water, fire, and air]; the honey-drops are the five sensual desires [rising from visible form, sound, smell, taste, and touch]; the bee is sin; the fire is disease and old age; and the dragon is death.

“The parable teaches men to be afraid of the causes of misery of birth, old age, disease, and death.”

When the Emperor Shoko had heard the Buddha's sermon, he was full of awe over the causes of misery. And then the Emperor Shoko worshipped the Buddha and said to him: “Now I received your merciful instruction, and I will in the future practise the law.”

“Good and great Emperor,” replied the Buddha, “you practise the law according to my words, and persevere in unshaken endurance on the path of salvation.”

When the Buddha had concluded the words of instruction concerning salvation, Emperor Shoko and the multitude of Buddha's disciples were full of exceeding joy.

THE MIGRATION OF A FABLE.

EDITORIAL COMMENT.

The Reverend D. Hayashi of Toyotsu Mura, Japan, informs us that the Chinese original from which he translated the parable of “The Man in the Well,” is a translation from the Sanskrit which was imported into China by the Buddhist pilgrim Gi-jô about twelve hundred years ago. When Buddhism was introduced into Japan, this Sutra also found its way to the Flowery Kingdom and is there well known. The special interest of this parable consists of the fact that it is known also in Europe where it was imported in the famous collection of Bidpai's Fables. We here reproduce a reduced fac-simile of an old German print, published in the year 1483 in Ulm by L. Halle.

En sollicher mensch würedt recht gegleicher ain man
 der sich einen lewen der yn iagt / vnd kam zu ainem
 dieffen brünnen vñ ließ sich dar ein vnd hüß sich mit
 seinen henden an zway claine reifen. So bei ende des galbrün
 nen gewachsen warend / vnd sein fuß satz er auff ain walzen