THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS.

BY THE EDITOR.

I had been reading Buddhist texts to a friend, and the solemn proclamation of the three characteristics still lingered in my ear:

"Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all conformations are transitory. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all conformations are transitory.

"Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all conformations are suffering. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all conformations are suffering.

"Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all conformations are lacking a self. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all conformations are lacking a self."

This formula which constitutes a significant feature of Buddhism is called tilakkhanam, i. e., “three characteristics,” and it reads in its briefest form in the original Pali:

"sabbe sankhara anicca,
sabbe sankhara dukkha,
sabbe sankhara anatta."

The word sankhara is an important Buddhist term. It is commonly translated by “compound,” or “conformation.” Other translations, such as “component things,” “elements of being,” “constit-
nents of being,” or “factors of being,” are not quite accurate. The word is derived from a root which means to adorn, to arrange, and denotes any arrangement, or composition, or configuration. It is a synonym of dharma (Pali dhamma) which is etymologically considered as the same word as the Latin forma and has two meanings: first, any material or bodily form; and secondly, the norm or law that governs the formation of bodily forms. In the second sense dharma has acquired the meaning of religion or truth. In the former sense it frequently replaces the word sankhara or conformation, in the official quotation of the tilakkhanam.

The idea is that all compounds are transitory because subject to change; are harassed by suffering, because they are liable to be joined to things unpleasant and disjoined from things pleasant; and that their construction is a mere combination, the unity being produced through composition. A compound does not form a thing-in-itself, called in the nomenclature of ancient Brahmanism atman, “self” (Pali atta). The contrast to this declaration of the impermanence of bodily compounds is found in the declaration of the permanence of things immaterial (called arupa in Pali) and these immaterial things are the ideals of Buddhist ethics, the treasures of the religion, such as insight into the impermanence of bodily existence, enlightenment, righteousness, the path if salvation and its aim, nirvana. These things are discovered by the Buddha, and we read in the Jataka the declaration that they are eternal and immutable, and that recognition of these truths constitutes the nature of a Buddha. We read for instance the following exposition of Gautama Siddhartha while he was still a Bodhisattva, a seeker of the Bodhi, and before he had attained to Buddhahood, when witnessing the words of his predecessor, the Buddha Dipankara:

“The Buddhas speak not doubtful words, the conquerors speak not vain words,
There is no falsehood in the Buddhas,—verily I shall become a Buddha.
As a clod cast into the air shall surely fall to the ground,
So the word of the glorious Buddhas is sure and everlasting.
As the death of all mortals is sure and constant,
So the word of the glorious Buddhas is sure and everlasting.
As the rising of the sun is certain when night has faded,
So the word of the glorious Buddhas is sure and everlasting.
As the roaring of a lion who has left his den is certain,
So the word of the glorious Buddhas is sure and everlasting.
As the delivery of women with child is certain,
So the word of the glorious Buddhas is sure and everlasting."

The doctrine of the Buddha was preached by his disciples who formed a great brotherhood called the sangha, which is the official name of the Buddhist order or church. Converts took their refuge in the trinity of the Buddha, the Sangha, and the Dharma. Of this trinity the Dharma was truth itself; the Buddha, the revealer of truth; and the Sangha, his church as the instrument of setting the example of a holy life and pointing out the way of salvation. This was condensed in the words of the refuge formula which reads:

"In the Buddha I take my refuge,
In the Sangha I take my refuge, and
In the Dharma I take my refuge."

The original Pali formula is repeated in Buddhist temples all over the world as follows:

"Buddham saranam gacchami,
Dhammam saranam gacchami,
Sangham saranam gacchami."

This refuge formula has been amplified into the following confession of faith, which we quote from the Samyuttaka Nikaya (III):

"To the Buddha will I look in faith. He, the exalted one, is the holy supreme Buddha, the all-wise, the great sage, the blessed one, who knows the worlds; the supreme one who yoketh men like oxen; the teacher of gods and men; the exalted Buddha.

"To the Doctrine will I look in faith. Well-preached is the doctrine by the exalted one. It has been made manifest; it needs no time; it says 'Come and see'; it leads to welfare; it is realized by the wise in their own hearts.

"To the Order will I look in faith. In right behaviour lives the order of the disciples of the exalted one; in proper behaviour lives the order of the disciples of the exalted one; in honest behaviour lives the order of the disciples of the exalted one; in just behaviour lives the order of the disciples of the exalted one: the four couples, the eight degrees of saintship, the order of the disciples of the exalted one, worthy of offerings, worthy of gifts, worthy of alms, worthy to have men lift their hands before them in reverence, the highest place in the world in which to do good.

"In the precepts of righteousness will I walk, which are beloved by the holy, uninfringed, unviolated, unmixed, uncolored, liberating, praised by the wise, unpolluted, and leading to emancipation."
It was under these impressions that I listened in the evening to the powerful strains of the Andante from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. The master exhibited here the full power of his genius and was preaching a religion. He emphasized his precepts with a serious conviction and vigorous earnestness, repeating the motive three times just as old Buddhist monks repeated their formulas three times in order to give emphasis to a truth and to inculcate its moral applications. The melody was almost a monotone, repeating the same measure again and again, without any attempt at embellishment; and the harmony consisted of a few changes in the accompaniment, apparently serving no other purpose than to lay stress on that one motive which was the main theme and the sole burden of the composer's thought. Without shaping my thoughts into definite words, I felt that Beethoven was a prophet who revealed the selfsame truths that had been explained by the Buddha. There was the same stern attitude, the same simplicity in propounding the doctrine and the same accentuating repetition, so that almost unconsciously the melody of the master's melodramatic theme spoke to me in words expressive of the Buddhist Dharma.

As in a dream I saw a Buddhist congregation, and a choir sang \textit{sotto voce} the following formula three times successively:

\begin{quote}
"All conformations
Always are transient,
Harassed by sorrow,
Lacking a self."
\end{quote}

A solo rendered in firm notes expressive of conviction sounded the answer in threefold repetition as follows:

\begin{quote}
"This is the doctrine
Taught by all Buddhas;
This is a fact and
Always proves true."
\end{quote}

Finally the chorus of the whole congregation repeated the melody with the following words:

\begin{quote}
"Words of the Buddha
Never can perish:
They will remain for
Ever and aye."
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
"Words of the Sangha
Set up a standard,
Point out salvation,
Teach us the way.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
"Words of the Dharma—
Truths are immortal,
Errors and passions
Will they allay."
\end{quote}
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THE TILAKKHANAM IN MUSIC.

L. van Beethoven.

Choir, mp

1. All con - for - ma - tions Al - ways are tran - sient, Harassed by sor - row,
Solo, f

2. This is the doc - trine Taught by all Bud - dhas; This is a fact and
Tutti, ff

3. Words of the Bud - dha Nev - er can per - ish; They will re - main for