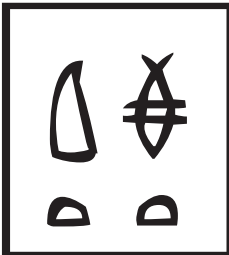
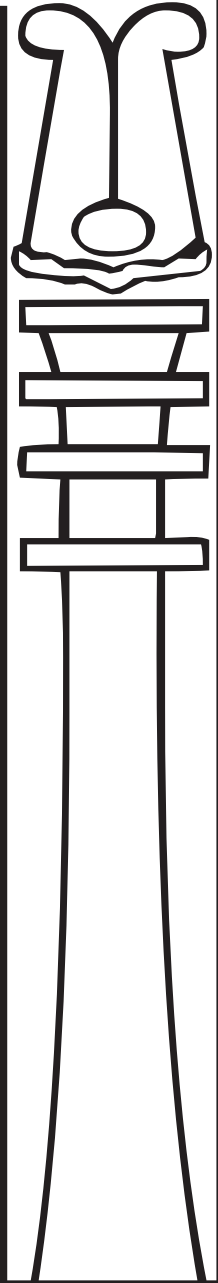
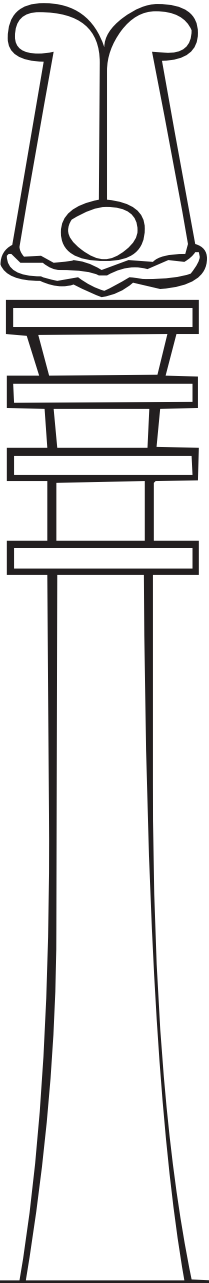


THE LAW
OF
RIGHTEOUS-
NESS

BY
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THE LAW OF RIGHTNEOUSNESS

*“Before beginning, and without an end,
As space eternal and as surety sure,
Is fixed a Power divine which moves to good,
Only its laws endure.”*

Light of Asia, Book VIII.

THERE is one conception which is common to all the great Religions of the world; common, not to the Religions alone, but also to every system of Philosophy that has inspired the lives and ways of men; a conception which, in some form or other, underlies the thoughts and guides the actions of the great majority of mankind:—the belief in the moral responsibility of man for all his good and evil actions; the belief that certain thoughts and words and deeds are right and others wrong; the belief in some manner of retribution for the evil, and in some secret power that rewards the good deeds that a man has done. Diverse as the standards in this respect of the various Religions necessarily are, we yet can trace this root-conception in every creed; it is, indeed, this innate idea of the existence of a Moral Law which is the basis of all the world-religions, and the value of these to humanity lies in the measure to which they have set the following of a pure way of life above all theologic dogmas, in the extent to which they have maintained and taught that sacrifice of the individual desire and aim to a wider and a grander ideal which is the underlying principle of every teaching of the Law of Righteousness.

And in this doctrine of the Moral Law, as in all human ideals, we can trace a constant process of advance to true nobility, an evolution ever reaching further towards the goal of selflessness. First the ignoble fear of the ill-doer that his deeds were marked by some supernal Being, who would visit upon himself, whether in this life or in another, the ill that he had compassed secretly; and then the natural corollary to this belief, that the same Being that awarded punishment for evil also might reward the secret good:—the ‘Threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise,’ that form so large a part of the teachings of the world’s Religions, dimly expressing

only, behind the appeal to base self-interest, the existence of a Law of perfect Justice, the true foundation of which was in a higher realm of thought. Next came the wider reading of the Law wherein the conception of self had broadened into national feeling and patriotism, which prohibited evil and inspired the good as retrogression or advance in the welfare of the nation, or, going yet further, of the whole race of men; and, last of all, the impersonal ideal of Noblesse Oblige,—the understanding that wrong-doing should be abstained from only because it is evil, good wrought for sake of right alone, and not for any thought of low self-seeking, not for any hope of a reward to come.

In this our latter age of deep and earnest enquiry into the causes of things, into the nature of the world in which we live, much, necessarily, of the older and unreasoning acceptance of bookish ethics has passed away;—it no longer seems to many to be a sufficient reason for regarding a definite act as right or wrong, that such act was commended or prohibited in a moral code stated to have been dictated by a divine or semi-divine Being so many thousands of years ago. Mankind has begun to emerge from the nursery-days of its intellectual up-bringing, and the *ex cathedrâ* ‘must’ and ‘must not’ of the theologic schools fails daily more and more completely to satisfy the legitimate demands of the intelligence of man. It is felt that, to be worthy of acceptance, a system of ethics must rest upon some securer basis than the fiat of a hypothetical Being; it must propound some more reasonable mechanism of causation than the voluntary interference of such a Being with human affairs; it must conduce to some apparent and useful end or aim,—a goal to be attained and an ideal to be achieved, not in the distant future past the gates of death, but here and now, here in the life we live; and, that it may satisfy the demands of the more advanced thinkers of our race, it must be founded on some nobler basis than that of mere self-interest, lest our abstention from wrong-doing be but dictated by craven fear of punishment, and all the good we do degenerate to merchantry, our love and virtue but as wealth, garnered to be bartered for personal happiness to come.

Such a system, in the highest and best sense of the word, is that expounded in the Buddhist Scriptures; and we shall endeavour to set before the reader the main outline of the Buddhist ethics, to shew the reasoning which underlies that system, and to indicate its value, rather to mankind at

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large, than to the individual. And if we say, the ethics of Buddhism, we must be taken to mean Buddhism almost in its entirety; for in a Religion which denies the existence of Soul and God there can be no theology, and all the dogma that exists in Buddhism is but a reasoned deduction from the phenomena of life. It is, then, on the value of its ethics that Buddhism must stand or fall,—it is its teaching of the Law of Righteousness, its exposition of the mechanism of moral retribution, that entitles it to serious consideration; by this alone it can be rightly judged, its message gathered and its purpose seen.

At the beginning of any enquiry into the nature of a system founded, as the Buddhist ethical system is founded, on a logical basis, it is necessary first to ascertain the real nature of the concepts with which that system deals,—in other words, we must first arrive at correct definitions of the subject-matter of our enquiry. The science of Ethics, as we conceive it, is concerned firstly with the nature of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong; secondly with the effects of right and wrong actions, etc., considered as causes; and thirdly with the mechanism of these causations. And in the preliminary enquiry as to what constitutes Right and Wrong from the Buddhist point of view, we at once arrive at a conception which is wholly at variance with the views of other religious systems, with the exception of the Vedanta and a few other of the great Indian Philosophies. This variance may perhaps be best expressed by the fact that, in Buddhism, there is no word which can accurately be translated as ‘Sin’ or ‘Evil,’ in the sense in which these words are generally understood in the religious systems of the West, i. e., in the sense of a positively-existent essence or quality opposed to the nature of Good.

Buddhist psychology, in effect, is a science which deals with the States of Consciousness, in a sense which regards the States of Consciousness as constituting the Universe; and in very truth, it is an obvious fact that what we name the Universe is only the sum-total of our collective States of Consciousness, the total of our percepts and concepts; and in all our ideas about the existence of the Universe we are dealing, and dealing only, with the modifications of our own sensuous and mental modes.

Good and Evil, then, if they are to find a place at all in the Universe as regarded from the Buddhist point of view, must be regarded as particular modifications of the States of Consciousness; and it is thus that they are

always considered in the Buddhist Sacred Books. “Kusalā dhammā, akusalā dhammā, avyākatā dhammā,”—The Good, the Evil and the Indeterminate States of Consciousness,¹—the opening words of the first book of the Abhidhamma, sum up and include, for the follower of the Buddha, the Universe in its entirety; the Universe, that is, not ‘in which we live and move and have our being;’ but rather that which has its being in us, and is component altogether, as far as our knowledge of it extends, of our own ever-changing Mental States, of which alone we have direct experience, and which in effect are what we name ‘ourselves;’ for, as another passage from our Scriptures runs:—‘All that we are is the result of what we have thought, is founded on our thoughts, is built up of our thoughts.’²

Good and Evil, then, are particular modifications of the States of Consciousness; and when we come further to enquire in what these modifications consist, we are met at once with another conception altogether different from the root-idea of the Semitic Religions prevalent in Western lands. For, in Buddhism, the Semitic idea of ‘Sin,’—a something tending to taint men’s actions for the worse, a principle of evil,—is wholly absent; and the words which we have above translated ‘Good’ and ‘Evil’ really mean ‘Skilful’ and ‘Unskilful’ respectively. And a good, or skilful thought, may be defined as one which causes happiness; an evil or unskilful thought is one which will produce pain or suffering. It is, therefore, primarily Ignorance—ignorance of the natural laws which govern our mental states—which is the cause of what we name ‘Evil;’ it is always ‘by not understanding’ that we come to have evil thoughts, to speak ill words, to perform evil actions; for could we realize first the pain and sorrow they would cause, such would never be committed. The child sees the glowing coals of fire, and, not understanding the inevitable effect of fire upon its fingers, seizes upon a red-hot cinder and is burnt;—that is Akusala, unskilful or evil action, born of the child’s ignorance of the nature of fire, and of his desire, born of that ignorance, to possess a new and shining toy. Had he but realized at first the inherent nature of fire—to burn and cause him pain—he would not have had that desire; least of all would he ever have done that foolish and unskilful act. That act is evil, because it causes pain,—in this case pain which is felt at once, felt by the doer of the unskilful deed. It would have been equally evil, equally unskilful, from the Buddhist point of view, had the child taken the cat’s paw instead of his own

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to do the deed,—for this would also have been a cause of pain and suffering; and if the child might at that time have felt no pain, yet; as we shall later see, it was himself, in the long run, that he was harming; harming to a greater extent than he harmed the cat.

If, then, the real root-cause of Evil is but ignorance, as the Buddhist thinks; the great cure for every evil is the removal of all taint of ignorance from all our thoughts; and in order to effect this removal we must first comprehend the particular nature of the Ignorance we seek to overcome. Here we come at once to the common basis of the Buddhist systems of ontology and ethics: it is in a sense this Ignorance which has made the world in which we live; this Ignorance which has been the cause of all the suffering in all the worlds;—only our ‘not knowing and not understanding’ which, as the Master taught us, has been the cause of all our wandering through the pain-filled Ocean of Existence.

Only not knowing and not understanding. That is the secret cause of sorrow, the parent of desire,—it is the Origin of Evil as the Buddhist understands the word. Could but one flash of wisdom lighten the murderer’s mind as he lifts his knife or sets his finger to the trigger, no blow would follow and no ill-deed be done; or could the thief perceive aright, desire would vanish from his heart—for Self and thought of Self were ended then. And with the ending of the phantasm of the Self all else of Ill were ended;—what evil or what cruelty of man but has sprung only from that chiefest of illusions, Self, from that sad separateness of thought which,

“... Crying ‘I’ would have the world say ‘I’,
And all things perish so if she endure?”

There are three chief forms which this dire Ignorance, Avijja, takes in the hearts of men,—Craving and Passion and the Belief in Self; the craving that inspires the thief, the passion which instigates the murderer, and the belief in self which is behind the other two; and, in the application of the Buddhist ethics, these are to be conquered by right understanding and by this alone. By understanding the Three Great Signs or Characteristics of all existence, by meditating on them till their inmost meaning is realised and known. For whoso knows the secret of Anicca,—how all things, high and low, subtle and gross alike, are ever-changing, passing without cessation

into other forms;—for him all Craving vanishes;—how should one, knowing even himself as fleeting, covet some other creature of the dying hours? And whoso comprehends the Sign of Sorrow,—how all creatures suffer, suffer but by their Ignorance, and in their fleeting agony commit ill-deeds;—how should he harbour hatred, knowing himself alike not free? And, last and of the three the greatest; whoso shall comprehend the nonexistence of the Self, who by clear Insight shall perceive aright that life is one and one alone, that only the Veil of Moha veils from the ignorant the Truth,—that ant and man and God, all this vast universe that seems about us is but the vision of a dream,—that there is here no Self, or yet no other than Self;—how should aught that is of the Evil overcome him, or Craving or Hatred rule his mind?

And so, it is primarily in the understanding, and, later, the realisation of these Three Signs—Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta—Transition and Sorrow and the Absence of a Soul, that the Buddhist seeks to overcome his Ignorance; for, Ignorance conquered, there is no other cause of Evil. So it is that, as pointed out in a former article in our Journal³, the Buddhist system of Ethics depends on its ontology; and we shall now go further into the nature of these three branches of the Tree of Ignorance;—Lobha, Dosa and Moha, Craving and Passion and the Delusion of the Self; and how they may, according to the Master's Teaching, be overcome and conquered by deep meditation and right understanding.

At the beginning of the Noble Eightfold Path which for the Buddhist is the Way to Righteousness and Peace, stands *Sammāditṭhi*, Right Comprehension; a word which is so important in its connotation to the Buddhist that it has come, in Ceylon and elsewhere, to be taken, when applied to a man, as meaning one of the Buddhist Faith. And this Right Comprehension is denned in the Buddhist Scriptures as meaning chiefly the understanding of Anatta, the doctrine of the non-existence of a Soul. In the intellectual appreciation of this fact lies, as we have realisation of the absence of a Soul, is the crowning point of all Buddhist endeavour; the Goal of Arahāt-ship, the gaining of deathless glory of *Nibbāna's* Peace. And so we will take first the corresponding mode of Ignorance; the belief in the existence of any permanent Soul or Ego; and see if we can understand the bearing of this belief on the question of the cause of Evil,

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and to what extent its abandonment may be likely to promote the well-being of Humanity.

In what we may call the Lower Selfishness,—in the desire for personal possession and enjoyment, however derogatory it may be to others; in the passion for Self-preservation; in the petty selfishness of daily life, we can trace clearly and simply the ill-effects on man and on his fellows of mere earthly selfishness as it is commonly understood; we can see in it the cause of perhaps the greater part of human misery; the cause, too, of much of the suffering that man, whose strength and knowledge should avail to make him nobler, yet continues to inflict upon his brother the brute. But there is a deeper manifestation of the delusion of Self, which we may appropriately term the Higher Selfishness—a delusion which, albeit to some minds immeasurably grander than the low self-seeking of the daily life, is yet more powerful for evil than the baser passion; a delusion which has been responsible for every crime committed in Religion's name, for every persecution which man has wrought upon his brother in the name of God;—the belief, namely, in the existence of an immortal and unchanging Soul, a Higher Self in man, which, after his death shall yet endure, and reap the harvest of the deeds the man has done. It was this Higher Selfishness, this apotheosis of the greatest curse of humanity, which, in its sad craving for self-existence, would see self's dire illusion carried even past the gates and the relentless peace of Death; this Brocken-spectre of the mind of man, which whetted the destroying sword of the Prophet of Arabia and his fanatic followers; which operated in the horrid secrecy of the Inquisition's dungeons; which fanned the flames of the religious hatred which deluged the Western World with blood;—the dark belief that cruelty abhorrent to the mind of man might be acceptable in the sight of God; that sword and stake and rack might win for murderer and torturer a glorious place in Heaven hereafter;—the dream of immortality inspiring man's heart to every darkest abomination, if only he might haply win life and glory for himself in a fancied world-to-come;—the dream that taints the highest and the noblest deeds of man with the dark dye of selfishness, and makes of all his charity and of all his virtue but a trading for a future joy.

Far be it from us to imply that all the actions of the many great unselfish ones who have laboured for Humanity and yet believed in their own immortality have been dictated by the sorry selfishness of this belief,

or have regarded all their wisdom and their love as but a bargaining with God or Destiny,—far from it, for man indeed is mostly better than his creeds. But we do think that, wherever that ill delusion of the Higher Selfishness exists in man, there is his altruism tainted,—unconsciously perhaps, but tainted yet;—tainted somewhat with the idea that he shall reap the good fruits of his charity and love, win for himself a grander future life, himself inherit somewhat of the good that he has done. And so it is that to us of the Buddhist Faith the character of such a man as the great English politician, Charles Bradlaugh, who looked for no future past the gates of Death, and yet worked gloriously for liberty and good, is grander by far and nobler than that of any greatest martyr of the Theistic creeds, who, if they have silently endured torture and persecution, or gone singing to the flames, have been upheld and inspired by what to us seems only selfishness:—the hope that they might gain a life of bliss beyond.

And this is the Higher Selfishness,—the misbelief of the Attavādin, the Believer in the Soul;—fondest delusion of the heart of man, the renunciation of which is the first step upon the Noble Eightfold Path. To realise that we ourselves are but as transitory waves upon the Ocean of existence,—that all the good we do, the love we have, the wisdom that we garner and the help we give is wrought but for the reaping of the universe, wrought because Pity is the highest Law of Life,—this is in Buddhism accounted the true beginning of all righteousness,—unselfishness that gives all, whilst knowing yet that it shall never reap the gain.

To this enunciation of the final reading of the Buddhist doctrine of Anatta there will be many that will object; saying that this is not the Buddhism of the Buddhist peoples, whose works of Merit are all wrought for the sake of self, looking for future bliss and recompense of good in lives of happiness hereafter; for much indeed has been written by opponents of our Religion on this very point, seeking to shew how all the Buddhist's acts are done for sake of self alone; that the chief idea of the Buddhist as we know him is the gathering of Merit and the avoidance of the penalties of sin; and that the 'Threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise' form just as prominent a part of Buddhism, judging from the practise of the Buddhist peoples, as of any other of the world's Religions. And this is true in a certain sense, though not perhaps to the extent that some have sought to prove; but it is true only in measure of the extent to which the Buddhist

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peoples have failed to grasp and live up to the Master's Teaching. For there is a threefold division of that Teaching, and, in accordance with his aptitude, man understands the greater or the lesser truth. The lowest type of man is like a dog, understanding only the meaning of the whip you shew to him, capable only of being frightened out of evil-doing by the 'Threats of Hell,'—and to him Buddhism appeals, because it says, 'If you do evil you will suffer punishment: you will go to a state of suffering, and will so live till all the evil you have done has been requited.' This we may classify as the first stage of the Teaching;—the higher cannot appeal to this poor man at all, because his chief moving sentiment is fear for self. Next comes the man who has passed out of this stage,—it is not fear of punishment that appeals to him, but selfish craving after happiness; and to him the second portion of the Buddhist Teaching comes home 'Do good, and you will gain fair recompense in Heaven hereafter'. So he does good, and, in the doing of it, as we shall later see, his mind grows wiser and somewhat of his Ignorance fades away; until at last he is able to understand and accept the final Teaching, the understanding that comes by purification of the mind;—that there is no Self at all to reap reward or punishment,—albeit reward and punishment will surely follow good and evil,—but that evil is to be abstained from, and the good performed, only for love's sake, out of pity for the later lives which shall inherit the Doing, out of compassion for the world to come. And, each in its order, each statement of the Law is true. That heaven and that healing hell will surely follow, and do surely exist;—but he is wise indeed who understands that Hell and Heaven alike are but himself,—the greater or the lesser Ignorance that reigns within his mind. To him who clearly sees this Absence of a Soul, these things are lessons of the past; for, with that Right Understanding all conception of himself as suffering or happy vanishes;—seeing herein no Self at all, he can no longer work for his soul's benefit; and all his piety and his love take on a new and grander aspect,—he is the Builder of a future which no illusion of himself can inherit, and the one Law of all his being is uttermost Compassion, his life lived only for love's sake, lived only to alleviate the sorrows of the world.

And not a little of this tremendous ideal has really penetrated to the great masses of the people who follow the Buddhist Religion; and the Merit-making of the average Buddhist is by no means such a selfish matter as some would wish us to believe. These point to the Pagoda-builder as the

type of spiritual self-seeking, and tell us that this man is building this Pagoda solely for his own Merit, that he would rather spend a lakh on building his own Pagoda than put one brick to the repairing of another man's; because, they say, he would think that that other man would reap the benefit of his repairs. The fact is true,—but no deduction could be further from the truth. The pious Burman, for example, likes to build his own Pagoda, quite new and nice; and he very seldom thinks of repairing one made by another. But he has by no means an idea in this so selfish as some would have us hold. His own action is dictated in the greater part by his devotion to the Teacher whose Memory he thus wishes to commemorate; and say, if there is one who is dear to us, to whom we seek to make a present, would we care only to patch up some bye-gone donor's gift to symbolise our love? Would we not rather make a gift quite new, more worthy of the recipient? Surely,—and this is precisely the idea which actuates the Burmese Pagoda-builder; he likes to make a new gift, and cares not if he impoverishes himself in so doing.⁴ As to the charge of selfishness so often brought against the pious Buddhist, those who know the facts understand to what a great extent this charge is baseless. The Buddhist believes that Merit, like the merchandise it is, can be given away; and there is no Religious work ever dedicated in a Buddhist land but what the donor, in pouring out the Water of Donation, invites all living beings in the three wide worlds to share and partake in the Merit of his gift. Thus far have even the common run of Buddhists in Buddhist lands grasped the great final teaching of unselfishness that is the crown and summit of the Buddhist creed.

And now, returning from this long digression, let us consider in what way this Moha, this Delusion of Selfhood,—cause, as we have indicated, of so much of the great world's suffering, may be conquered and overthrown. How may we win that deeper wisdom of the true enlightenment, which shall teach us that all we thought was Self was but a delusion of our minds; how may we enter on the life that is not lived for Self, but for the love of all the world,—the world whose suffering we may lessen or increase, according as we live well or ill therein? Only, answers the Buddhist, only by knowing and by understanding; by penetrating with the sure lamp of Wisdom into the darkness of Self's delusion; by seeking out, in deepest Meditation, the real nature of the world in which we live, the nature of this Self after which we must continue still to crave, until the Light of Wisdom

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dawns, and all the Veil of Nescience is rent aside. Do we still dream the world is good, that aught of it shall endure for ever, or that it was wrought in the mould of mercy and of love, fashioned by some mightier Self, that the lesser might benefit and attain a deathless perfect life? Then let us look upon the world and see if this can be. Had all this Universe been wrought by some great Self, had it been wrought but by the lesser love and pity of thy human heart, could it then be, as it most surely is, full of all manner of cruelty and ignorance and woe? Would it not be, like to the God or Self that made it, bountiful, eternal, sure;—even as like gives ever rise to like, flower blossoming to flower in ever sure causation? If in man's heart of hearts there reigned this Self, come from eternity and but a pilgrim on its changeless way, could there be in his nature aught of folly or of evil, or any limit to his wisdom and his love? Nay, surely; and all the wide world's agony with its unnumbered voices teaches to whoso dares to hear that there is no Greater Self behind this grim phantasmagoria of life; not the less surely than our own incompetence, our weakness and our ignorance and woe, tells us that we too, like all the units of this universal life, ourselves are only a becoming and a swift transition,—Impermanent, and born to Sorrow, and Without a Soul.

Then, turning from the phenomena that our ignorance names external and subjective, to those we deem internal and subjective,—analysing, in deep introspection, our own hearts and inmost beings,—here, too, we find the same sad lesson;—sad till we have learned and mastered it, when at last it grows to be the source of all our happiness. Here, too, we find but change and instability, where we had looked for the Unchanging and the Real. How many of our hopes, our aspirations or our proud ideals remain as we had hoped and dreamed but yesterday; or which of all our great desires or high ambitions shall endure even for the little span of our poor human lives? Which, rather, of them all,—of all the hosts of thought-things we have once identified with our Self,—which of them all were worthy to endure for ever, which was untainted utterly with any baser thought? And, looking yet deeper, till we can watch the rise and fall of the thought processes, swift ripples on the troubled surface of the Lake of Mind, we see at last how, rather than say 'our thoughts, our wishes, our desires,' we should understand our Selves as but a little part of these, till, like a new Copernicus measuring the motions of the Galaxy of Thought, we find this erstwhile central and immobile Self, which once we dreamed these stars of

thought shone but as lesser lights to guide and serve, is of itself a lesser satellite and servitor,—swayed in its orbit truly, but unswaying these.

And so we learn at last the secret of Anatta, seeing the Self thus transitory and ever-changing; wrought but of thoughts that rise and pass in swift succession; component of the very stuff that dreams are made of; and, learning this, we cease to serve and worship that offspring of our Ignorance. Then, only then, our hearts become enfranchised, and then alone our lives are given unto good; then, comprehending how our acts may sway the lives of others, generations yet unborn, and multiply their sorrows or augment their peace,—then do we turn from hatred to compassion, from cruelty to love, from ignorance to knowledge;—how shall we sin against these worlds we are creating, or dower with pain and suffering the future lives that are to-day the offspring of our minds?

And, as it is with this chief child of Ignorance, Moha, the Delusion of the Self, so is it also with Dosa, Hatred. When we have learned that Noble Truth of Sorrow, learned in deep meditation on the world about us how all must come to death and are doomed to Woe, Hatred is surely vanquished, giving place to Love:—for who should hate, once he has understood and known? *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*, and, could we learn the hidden cause, the ignorance, the greed, the little-understanding wrath that prompts the action of the man we deem our enemy, how could we hate back in return, who also are not free from ignorance; or cherish aught but pity unto one so deeply suffering that he yet could hate?

So, also, seeing all things impermanent, Lobha, Craving, dies from our heart and deeds. Only to-morrow what is now the object of our desire will pass away; only to-morrow we ourselves will in so far have changed that that desire itself has faded from our hearts, giving place unto another and yet another,—each craving giving birth to yet another grief; even as one outcast upon the ocean drinks in his folly of its bitter waves,—only to crave and drink again, till death shall come and bring him peace. But when this Impermanence is realised and known, Craving itself dies out,—for all this thirst after possessions depends on the illusion that these may be held and kept for ever,—that the pleasure of their owning will not pass away; and, above all, on that same greatest of delusions, the belief in a living Self, an Ego or a Soul to have and hold its own; even as the Master has said:—

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“Sons have I, and mine this pelf,”

Thus the Foolish One is deeming:

He himself hath not a Self!

How, then, ‘Sons’ and ‘Wealth ’ is dreaming?5

And so, it is by Meditation,—by deep and earnest thought upon the mystery of his being and the nature of the Universe he sees about him,—that the Buddhist seeks to overcome the Evil in his life;—by illumining, with the light of a profound understanding of the Universe without him and within, all that old ancestral darkness of Ignorance, whereof the home and citadel is the Belief in Self. And,—because so much in all our lives is founded on and guided by this sad belief,—to him who realises its utter falsity, there comes at first a great and awful blank in life, a grief well-known to all who have in any sense attained:—wherein all good and useful object in the Universe seems lost to him, for the Soul for which his life has heretofore been lived, has passed away for ever, and with it all the army of his former hopes and aspirations, in so far as these were founded on that conception of the Self. It is the darkest hour in all the evolution of a man, this realisation that the Self that he has striven to perfect and work for is no more than a delusion;—but it is also the darkest hour which goes before the dawn;—for soon that darkness passes, giving way to the light of a deeper and surer Wisdom, wherein he sees unfold before him the glorious vision of a new and grander life;—a life lived for all, compassionating all, in love with all the world; a life of tireless and unceasing effort, lived no longer for that vain phantasy of Self, with all its darkling egotism and its manifold disillusionings; but only for the greater world of the Not-self about him,—the world whose sorrow he can lessen and whose burden he can lighten, to the extent to which he can illumine with compassion and with wisdom the life that once he deemed his own.

Such, then, is for the Buddhist the true Origin of Evil,—Avijja, Ignorance,—with its three chief manifestations of Craving, Hatred, and the Belief in any sort of Soul; and such is the means,—by Meditation, winning at last to comprehension, of the Truth,—whereby he seeks to free his being from the Source of Ill. Evil is born of Ignorance, and brings forth Suffering; Good is that which brings us nearer to Release; and, if we follow and apply this theorem to the thoughts and as acts considered Right and Wrong in Buddhism, we shall see how the whole of the Buddhist system of practical

ethics is founded on this conception,—founded on a logical deduction from the nature of the Universe and its Laws; and, further, we shall comprehend the working of the Law of Righteousness,—how Evil brings its own inevitable punishment, and Good itself is agent of its own reward.

The first part of the Buddhist ethical system,—that which deals with the avoidance of acts definitely considered as Wrong, may, for all practical purposes, be considered as summed up in those Five Precepts which are binding on every Buddhist, Monk and layman alike. These Five Precepts are:—Not to kill, not to steal, not to commit impurity, not to use false or cruel speech, and, last but not least, to abstain from the use of any intoxicant. These, or similar prohibitions, are, with the exception of the last, common to all the great Religions of the world; and they are rated in Buddhism itself as of such pre-eminent importance that the recital of a solemn obligation to preserve them intact is, with the Three Refuges, the formula of admission of a layman to the Buddhist Church, and the precursor of every religious act, whether it be the offering of charity or the practise of personal meditations and devotions. In some respects, indeed, Buddhism has gone further than most Religions in this matter of prohibitions; for, as might be expected in a Religion where Theology and Pneumatology play no part, Ethics takes in it the foremost place. Thus we find, for instance, that it is all life that is sacred in the Buddhist's eyes,—not human life alone; that harsh and cruel speech, as well as deliberate falsehood, are regarded as a sin; that not only drunkenness, but even the moderate partaking of intoxicants is absolutely prohibited; for, in the Buddhist's eyes, these prohibitions are founded on the existence of enduring Laws, and the infringement of any of them brings its inevitable punishment, in proportion to the extent to which that Law is broken. Circumstances only alter cases in degree; if you do evil in the taking of human life, you do evil if you destroy a life less highly organised; and, in this case, you will suffer in future in proportion to the evolutionary advancement of the life destroyed;—less for the killing of the caterpillar than of the cat, less for cat than cattle, most of all for man; for, ages before the time of the great Evolutionists of the West, the Buddha had discovered the central fact of Evolution:—all life is one, and all killing is an evil deed.

Now at first sight, such a series of statements as that suffering is involved in the breaking of any of these Precepts in any degree may seem

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to many to be purely arbitrary, to be an *ex cathedrâ* pronouncement founded at the best on utilitarian ideas; if not on a mere sentimental dislike on the part of the Founder of Buddhism of the particular acts here prohibited as evil deeds. This is far from being the case. Each one of these prohibitions is the application in our human lives of some great Law of nature,—of some Law that governs in the Mental World as surely as does gravitation in the physical universe; and the whole might be described as a system of mental hygiene, the laws of which, arbitrary at first sight, are seen on examination into their causation and effects in life to be founded only on the clear and logical deductions of science. And it is most important,—especially in this age of intellectual advancement,—that this should be thoroughly understood. If you say to a reasonable man “If you drink water out of the river, unfiltered and unboiled, you render yourself liable to enteric and cholera,” he is like to disregard such an injunction,—it seems so arbitrary a statement, and there seems so little connection between the infringement of that rule and cholera, that he is unlikely to follow that advice. But if you go further, and explain the existence of bacteria to him, you supply the missing link in the chain of causation; and the very intelligence which forbids his acceptance of your injunction so long as it seems merely arbitrary, bids him to follow it, so soon as he has grasped the reason why.

We are, then, forbidden in Buddhism to take life, to rob, to commit impurity, to lie, to drink intoxicants: and we are threatened with the penalty of future suffering if we shall disobey these rules. And why? To understand this we must remember what has gone before,—how ‘evil’ for the Buddhist is that which brings suffering in its train; and how the world we live in, and the destiny we bear,—its meed of pleasure and of pain,—is made in the greater part of the mental Doing we inherit; just as the world a man inhabits in his dreaming is component in the main of the thoughts and actions of his daily life.

Now a little consideration will shew that the infringement of any of these Precepts, of this hygiene of the mind, involves suffering, and that in more ways than one. Take killing for example, and we all see at once how its infliction causes pain to the thing killed,—a little further consideration will shew us how that suffering comes home, too, to the one that kills. Let us suppose, for example, that you kill some creature out of wanton

carelessness; say, walking in the road, you crush an ant that you have seen. Then, according to our Buddhist doctrine, there is a punishment inevitably attendant on that deed. If you cut your finger, in a certain measurable space of time you suffer pain; and, incidentally (and herein perhaps lies the secret of the object and utility of pain) you learn to be more careful with your knife in future. But, if the Buddhist ontology be followed, it is only your Ignorance (in the technical sense, of course) that makes you to distinguish between the Self and the Not-self; and you have hurt yourself in exactly the same measure that you have hurt the ant that Moha makes you think something else than you. You have, as it were, imposed by that act of carelessness a stress upon the Universe, and the inevitable reaction will surely follow;—only, if you kill some nerve cells of your own body that reaction, the pain of it, will come home swiftly, in perhaps quarter of a second or less; while, if you kill another portion of yourself, the ant, it may take a longer while, for, by the doing of it you have hurt your own mind, you have further increased that Moha, that illusion of the Self, the Ignorance that made you careless of the suffering you inflicted, merely because you thought it inflicted on another than yourself. Worse, if the ant have bitten you, and you have killed him in revenge, for then to Moha you add Hatred to your life; or if he ate your goods and you killed for this, for then you multiply your craving and do evil for an ant's meal of gain; and it were better for you to grasp with your own hand a red-hot coal, and quickly suffer for your ignorance, and have done with it; than to use another's hand to do the grasping, and, by your cowardice and cruelty, to inflict, not only suffering upon your victim, but a double misery on yourself;—the penalty, first for the pain that you directly cause, and, secondly, for the worse violence you commit upon the subtler structure of your own mind and life in which you have augmented the threefold offspring of Ignorance, and thereby cast out the life you deem your own yet further from Nibbāna's Peace. Because you have so augmented the evil your nature, because you have increased its Hatred and its Self-delusion, you have damaged yourself far more than all the violence of pain or death could hurt your victim, for there is no greater suffering than Ignorance, and it is the Ignorance of bygone lives which is the chiefest cause of whatsoever suffering we now endure.⁶

Killing, then, harms the killer, because it increases his own Craving, Hatred, or Self-delusion; and it is easy to apply this reasoning to the other

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acts prohibited, and see the mental causation operating for evil in them all. If you steal, you increase your Craving; if you commit impurity, your Passion and Desire; if you lie or use evil speech, you magnify your Hatred and Self-delusion; and, lastly, if you drink intoxicants you tend to multiply all three; for in all the world there is nothing that more increases Self-delusion than the use of intoxicants,—be the amount taken ever so small,—or anything that tends more to the breaking of the other precepts, to lying, and in chastity and murder, as criminal statistics teach us only too conclusively.⁷

And, conversely, when we come to consider those things which are held Good in Buddhism, the fulfilment of which constitutes the second step in the Path of Righteousness, we find that here, too, all is founded on the same conception of the Universe; and that the acts prescribed as right and goodly for a man to do are just those things that most tend to reduce that threefold offspring of Ignorance, and thereby to diminish the world's suffering and open the Way to Peace. First of them all,—and here again we are on common ground with most of the great Religions of the world,—first of all comes Charity; and, just as the sins prohibited in the Pentologue do evil in a two-fold manner, so Charity effects a twofold good:—good to the recipient, whom that charity relieves of suffering, and greater good to the giver, because his Ignorance is thereby diminished in two ways. Say you give a meal to one that is an hungered; you have diminished thereby your own Lobha, the Greed that would inspire you to keep that food for yourself; and, secondly, you have reduced your self-delusion, for the very compassion that dictates your gift is but a manifestation of the recognition that, in some little-understood fashion, this poor man that wants a meal is not other or apart from you. And, inasmuch as by thus attenuating Ignorance, a man diminishes the forces in his being that work for evil; and, in the process of transmigration it is the total of the good and evil forces that create a happy or a sorrow-laden life; so we say that Charity,—that Love, and Reverence, and Gentleness, and all fair virtues that our Books inculcate, themselves are harbingers of new and happier destinies,—for Character is Destiny, and that which is to-day but an ideal and an aspiration, will, if the Conservation of Energy hold good in the noetic world, as we believe it does, to-morrow have blossomed in a life wherein these things are hopes and dreams no longer; but part of the very fact and nature of the Universe those bye-gone thoughts have made.

Such is a brief outline of the Buddhist conception of the Law of Righteousness, of the origin of evil, and of the way whereby evil brings its own punishment, and good its own reward;—a system of ethics founded on a reasoned argument from the known facts of life to what must surely follow, if the universal laws we see in operation in the world about us shall continue to hold good also in the Kingdom of the Mind. If you admit the Buddhist argument, that all the life we live is but the result of thought, then, surely it is true and certain, this Law of Righteousness that reigns beyond all lesser laws. But, setting aside all question of Ontology, one thing stands true and clear, so long as this our human race shall live,—that, were this system of the Buddhist Way of Life accepted of all men, and followed, after their ability by all, then the greater portion of the suffering and strife of this sad world were but a bye-gone memory to-morrow; for all the woe that springs from Greed and Craving, the anguish born of Hatred and the torture of Desire were passed out of the lives and hearts of men for ever.

Surely that day will come, though Sorrow, servant of Nescience, be tardy in the teaching; yet some day it will come, that day after which Humanity has striven since first our human kind passed by the Rubicon of the brute, and the Survival of the Fittest, which is the brute's great law of life. Self-seeking for the brute,—for Man the Sacrifice of Self; the world's thrones for the weak and foolish,—Self-empire for the Strong and Wise; Hatred grown into Love, and all the darkness of Ignorance illumined by the Light of Lights, which is the Law of Uttermost Compassion:—thus shall it be on earth when the Great Law shall have at last worked out the Destiny of Man:—in that supremest Day when Love and Wisdom shall have conquered all Humanity, and opened for all feet to tread the Way to the Illimitable Peace.

NOTES

1 Dhammasangani I. 1. For the detailed exposition and classification of the three Modes of Consciousness referred to, see Mrs. Rhys Davids' Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics, where the text and annotations of Dhammasanganiis given in full, together with an admirable Introduction dealing with the matter of the work.

2 Dhammapada I. I have preferred to adhere to the translation given by Prof. Max Miiller in Sacred Books of the East, because although doubtless

the Commentator is right when he says that the Dhammā in question are the four Nāma-Khandhā, exclusive of Rūpa, yet to the Western student that statement would be lacking in the vivid definiteness that characterises it to a Buddhist; whilst the translation given conveys to the Western mind exactly that completeness which, in view of the absolute interdependence of Nāma and Rūpa, the passage possesses for the Buddhist. The two stories given by Buddhaghosa in illustration of Dhp. 1 and 2, are entirely dependent for their application on this or a similar rendering of the opening lines of the verses.

3 See *On the Threshold of Buddhist Ethics*, by Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids; *BuDDHISM* Vol, I, No. 1, page 39 et seq.

4 There is another reason, not commonly understood by Occidentals, which accounts for many of the ruined religious edifices that are so common in all Buddhist lands. This is the Buddhist doctrine of Anicca,—how all things, even to the fairest virtues and the greatest charities, must in themselves be evanescent, even as the merit good deeds bring) itself must fade away with time. Better, perhaps, than any other object-lesson, the shrine in ruins brings home to the Buddhist this great teaching of his Religion; and so it seems to many to be a futile, if not actually an irreligious thing, to attempt to arrest the inevitable hand of time, or to render permanent any work soever wrought by human hands. We of the West, with our great ideas of the value of human labour and of money, are only too apt, applying our own standards, to regard all this as shocking waste; but we should take into consideration rather the ideas which lie behind that apparent wastefulness than the fact itself; for, truly it is these ideas which alone are of importance;—the works of man all perish in the dust, whilst the great ideals that inspired their builders blossom and bear new fruits from age to age.

5 *Dhammapada*, v. 62.

6 If, however, one has killed without knowing that one was killing, and without carelessness as to whether one killed or not, then, according to Buddhist views,—Ignorance not having been increased,—no ill effect will follow, as is well illustrated in the story of Cakkhupala Thera, in Buddhaghosa's *Commentary on Dhammapada* v. i.

7 Cf. the article on Alcohol and the Mind in the present issue of Buddhism, p. 411 et seq., and also note on The Curse of Alcohol p. 551 et seq.