

ARTICLE VII.

THE "SACRED BOOKS OF THE EAST."¹

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GREAT expectations were excited by the announcement made some six years ago, that Professor Max Müller was about to edit a series of translations of Oriental sacred books. Separate translations have indeed been put forth before, in one country and another, now of this work, now of that. But the present is the first systematic attempt to collect translations of the original records and documents of Eastern religions into one uniform series. The plan of the work is comprehensive and consistent: it is under the general supervision of one thoroughly competent mind; the details are to be wrought out by Oriental scholars whose fitness for the task all acknowledge; and it covers the entire ground of early religious thought in Asia.

We imagine that the expectations of scholars have not been disappointed. Doubtless it would be hard to find any two Orientalists who would wholly agree in the interpretation of all the dark sayings of the ancient Zend or Sanskrit; every scholar will find something to criticise in a translation made by another hand. But, on the whole, it will be agreed that the present series furnishes to the Oriental investigator, to the student of

¹ The Sacred Books of the East, translated by various Oriental Scholars, and Edited by F. Max Müller. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Vol. i. The Upanishads, translated by F. Max Müller. Part i. pp. ci, 320. 1879. Vol. ii. The Sacred Laws of the Aryas as taught in the schools of Apastamba, Gautama, Vasishtha, and Baudhayana. Part i. Apastamba and Gautama. Translated by Georg Bühler, pp. lvii, 312. 1879. Vol. iii. The Sacred Books of China; the Texts of Confucianism, translated by James Legge. Part i. The Shu King, the religious portions of the Shih King, the Hsiao King, pp. xxx, 492. 1879. Vol. iv. The Zend Avesta. Part i. The Vendidad, translated by James Darmesteter, pp. cii, 240. 1880. Vol. v. Pahlavi Texts, translated by E. W. West. Part i. The Bundahis, Bahman Yast, and Shayast La-shayast, pp. lxxiv, 438. 1880. Vol. vi. The Quran, translated by E. H. Palmer. Part i. Chap. i.-xvi. pp. cxviii, 268. 1880. Vol. vii. The Institutes of Vishnu, translated by Julius Jolly, pp. xxxvii, 316. 1880. Vol. ix. The Quran. Part ii. Chap. xvii.-cxiv. pp. x, 362. 1880. Vol. x. The Dhammpada: A Collection of Verses, being one of the Canonical Books of the Buddhists. Translated from the Pali, by F. Max Müller, pp. lv, 224. 1881. Vol. xi. Buddhist Suttas. Translated from Pali, by T. W. Rhys Davids, pp. xlvi, 320. 1881.

comparative religion, or to the curious antiquarian, the best, as well as the most accessible, apparatus which can be found, apart from the original texts themselves, for the pursuit of his studies.

Yet the series is not complete, and — pardon the solecism — will not be, even when finished. The first volume, for instance, gives us Professor Max Müller's translation of five of the Upanishads, short, speculative treatises appended to the Vedas. Supposing these five to be of average length, the translation of all the Upanishads would fill forty-seven volumes; for two hundred and thirty-five Upanishads are extant! and even then we should have but one class of works, among many which in India are embraced by the general title "Sacred Books." So of Muhammadanism; Professor Palmer has contributed to the series a translation of the Quran (Vols. vi. and ix.), which must be supposed to be more accurate than Sale's, though we imagine it will be long before it supersedes that in the popular estimation.¹ But the Quran is not the only authoritative book with the Muhammadans. The traditions relating to the prophet, which were handed down by his friends and companions, and collected, arranged, and edited by faithful divines within about two and half centuries of his death, have come to be regarded by all devout Moslems as of equal

¹ Palmer's translation bears the same relation to Sale's that the Revised Version of the New Testament does to the Authorized. Sale is more popular, Palmer more scholarly. This is shown even in the spelling of the name, *Koran* by the one, *Qur'an* by the latter. Sale's is perhaps superior as a piece of English composition; Palmer's more literal translation seeks to be a better representation of the original Arabic. Sale has not scrupled to introduce, under the cover of italics, much exegetical matter into the text of his translation. Palmer, while criticising him for his departure from the strict fidelity required of a translator, relegates this necessary explanatory matter almost wholly to his notes. If a man is going to do a thing which some Orientalists have pronounced impossible, namely, to read the Quran through, he would do well to buy Sale; but if he is going to sit down and try to find out what Muhammad really said, he had better take Palmer. As a specimen of the two translations, we append in parallel columns, the first (and best) chapter of the Quran as given by the two versions:

SALE.

In the name of the most merciful God.

Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures; the most merciful, the King of the day of judgment. Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious; not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray.

PALMER.

In the name of the merciful and compassionate God.

Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds, the merciful, the compassionate, the ruler of the day of judgment! Thee we serve and thee we ask for aid. Guide us in the right path, the path of those thou art gracious to; not of those thou art wroth with; nor of those who err.

authority with the Quran itself. There are six vast collections of these traditions, containing in all many thousand separate narrations. One Muhammadan jurist alone incorporated thirty thousand into his system of law. These collections properly fall under the heading "Sacred Books of the East." We regret that Professor Müller's plan does not include any of these traditions. He ought to furnish us specimens of them. Should he undertake to translate them all, indeed, men might well wonder whereunto this thing would grow. The same difficulty confronts the scholar who undertakes to study any Eastern religion—with the exception, perhaps, of Zoroastrianism, whose extant documents are comparatively few; elsewhere, he faces a huge mountain of literature. The most delicate, as it is in some respects the most important, part of the editor's task, therefore, is that of judicious and discriminating selection. Professor Müller aims at making such a selection. His scheme embraces such representative and illustrative works chosen from the several classes of Eastern religious literature as will best display the state and drift of religious thought: it will be like a cabinet of geology, illustrating by specimens the nature, the appearance, and the stratification of the several deposits of religious speculation in the early Orient.

It was announced at the beginning that the series would consist of twenty-four volumes, divided as equally as possible among the six religions of the East which may properly be said to rest upon sacred texts. These are Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism or Parsism, Confucianism, Lao-tsiism, and Muhammadanism. The different volumes of the series have rapidly followed one another. The first appeared in 1879; and the eleventh during the closing months of last year. Circumstances have prevented us from giving an earlier notice to any of them. It is too late now to review the earlier volumes. Minute criticism must at any time be relegated to specialists. We propose now merely to glance at the last volume received by us (Vol. xi.), and at some future time to remark briefly on the general character of Oriental sacred books, with the view of showing our readers what they are to expect when they open the volumes of this stately series.

Of the series, as thus far published, we may mention that the first, second, and seventh volumes are concerned with Hinduism, the third with Confucianism, the fourth and fifth with Zoroastrianism, the sixth and ninth with Muhammadanism, and the tenth and eleventh with Buddhism. The eighth, twelfth, thirteenth, and sixteenth volumes have appeared since these lines were written.

Turning now to this eleventh volume, we find it to contain seven of the Buddhist Suttas, translated from the Pali by Mr. T. W. Rhys Davids. Among Buddhist scholars of the present day no one stands higher than he. A small book on Buddhism which he prepared a few years ago for the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge probably gives,

in less space, a better and more intelligible view of Buddhism than any other English work ; while his Hibbert Lectures for 1881 on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by Buddhism, have done much to enlarge the sphere of his reputation.

The Pali, which is the sacred language of Southern (or Ceylon) Buddhism — that in which its literary treasures lie enshrined, as those of Hinduism do in Sanskrit — is closely allied to this older and more widely known tongue of ancient Hindustan. It was one of the Prakrits, or Aryan vernaculars of ancient India. It is supposed to have been, in the sixth century before Christ, the vernacular of Magadha — the region now known as Oudh. It was here that Gautama Buddha was born ; Pali was his native tongue, the medium of his earliest instructions, and the language in which his disciples and followers recorded the legends of his life, and developed the doctrines of their master. Thus, as Professor Childers says, the Magadhese tongue, though originally merely a provincial idiom, was raised by the genius of a great reformer to the dignity of a classical language. When, after centuries of conflict, Buddhism was finally overwhelmed by the forces of Brahmanism, and driven from its early continental home, its adherents, carrying with them their sacred books and the knowledge of the language in which the Buddha had spoken and in which those books were written, crossed over into Ceylon. Thus Pali disappeared from its birthplace in Northern India, and lived as a sacred classic in Ceylon ; while it largely modified the language spoken in its new location, and thus gave rise to the modern Singhalese, the vernacular of by far the larger part of the inhabitants of Ceylon at the present time. It is therefore to Ceylon that the student of Buddhism turns for its earliest and authentic literature. Here Buddhism lives in its purity ; here its original records have been preserved ; while the Northern Buddhism, now current in Nepal and Thibet, has gone far astray from the pristine standard, and the documents of the North, written in Sanskrit, are, compared with the Pali literature, modern, corrupt, and unauthentic. Still more is this true of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhism ; in Burmah, also, little is found but translations, sometimes inaccurate, from the Pali.

The sacred canon of the Southern Buddhists is embraced in three collections known as the Tripitakas, or the *three baskets* ; of these the first (the Vinaya Pitaka) is concerned with the discipline and doctrine of the Buddhist order of ascetics, "probably the most influential," writes Mr. Rhys Davids, "as it is the oldest in the world." The second (the Sutta Pitaka) contains discourses for the laity, and has furnished the materials of the present volume ; while the metaphysical tenets of Buddhism (not of Buddha — there is reason to believe that these are an accretion of later times) are relegated to the third Pitaka, known as the Abhidhamma Pitaka, or the Pitaka *after* or *upon* (*abhi*) the treatises of religion (*dhamma*). Mr. Rhys Davids has made an estimate, showing

that translations into English of the entire collection would occupy only four times as much space as our English Bible; ¹ and without the repetitions, which are of constant occurrence, the "Buddhist Bible," he thinks, "may be even shorter than ours." Buddhism has been far less prolific than Hinduism of literary offspring.

It is probable, we may remark in passing, that before many years have passed all the Pali canonical books, together with some uncanonical writings of great historical value, will be accessible in English translations. A Pali Text Society has been formed in England, under competent and energetic management, of which the object is the editing and publishing, first in the original and afterwards in English translations, of the entire body of sacred literature in that language — so far, at least, as it shall not be embraced in Professor Muller's series of sacred books. In the meantime, we find useful and interesting specimens of it in the volumes before us.

Mr. Rhys Davids explains in his introduction, which embraces the necessary prolegomena for the proper understanding of the works about to be presented, — dealing with questions of date and authorship, etc., — the principles on which he has proceeded. "I have endeavored," he says, "to make such a choice [from the entire number of Pali sacred works] as would enable me to bring together into one volume a collection of texts which should be as complete a sample as one volume could afford of what the Buddhist scriptures, on the whole, contain. With this object in view, I have refrained from confining myself to the most interesting books — those, namely, which deal with the Noble Eightfold Path, the most essential, the most original, and the most attractive part of Gotama's teaching; and I have chosen accordingly, besides the Sutta of the Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness (the Dhamma-kakka-ppavattana-Sutta), which treats of the Noble Path, six others, which treat of other sides of the Buddhist system; less interesting, perhaps, in their subject matter, but of no less historical value."

It is unnecessary to give the names of the Suttas which he has here translated and printed. Those who are curious will find the list in the book itself; those who are not would not be edified by a string of unmeaning names. All these Suttas are from the second great collection of Buddhist works, known, as already explained, as the Sutta Pitaka. The first collection, the Vinaya Pitaka, containing the rules of the order of Buddhist mendicants, we are glad to see, is to appear in subsequent volumes of this series of translations. "Of the rest of the matters dis-

¹ The late Prof. Childers says eleven times as much; but Mr. Rhys Davids' estimate is later, and probably more accurate, as it is based on an actual count of the words in certain selected portions of the Buddhist and Christian scriptures, whose proportion to the whole body of these scriptures, respectively, is then carefully ascertained.

cussed in the Buddhist Sacred Books," says the translator, "of Buddhist legend, gospel, controversial theology, and ethics — the works selected will I trust give a correct and adequate, if necessarily a somewhat fragmentary, idea."

The word *Sutta* (Sanskrit *Sutra*) means originally a *string* or *thread*. In its literary sense it denotes a string or collection of terse, epigrammatic, aphoristic sentences or maxims, into which Hindu writers have delighted to compress religious, moral, philosophical, or grammatical instruction. In the case of Sanskrit Sutras intelligibility has often been sacrificed to brevity. But in Pali literature the concise, aphoristic quality is less prominent, and the Buddhist Suttas are more like separate chapters of a work. They are either in prose or verse, and embrace sometimes but a few lines, sometimes several thousand. In either case each *Sutta* is complete in itself, and consists of a connected narrative, or a collection of verses on some one subject, didactic or other.

Mr. Rhys Davids says that the age of the Suttas "can be fixed without much uncertainty at about the latter end of the fourth or the beginning of the third century" before Christ. He thinks that the books were extant in their present form within one hundred and fifty years of Gautama's death; yet so uncertain is Eastern chronology that he is obliged to regard this date, indefinite though it is, as merely tentative. It is more certain that the books in their present shape are but the outgrowth of older materials, "parts of which they have preserved intact." Most of them purport to give the very words of Buddha or events in his life witnessed by his personal followers.¹ As to authorship, nothing can be asserted, for nothing is known.

A few extracts from the Suttas here translated will give the reader a good idea at once of their style and of the character of Gautama's morality and teaching. We give first a paragraph of constant occurrence in the *Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta* (which describes the death of the Buddha), as it was apparently a well-known summary of Buddhistic teaching:

"And whilst the blessed one stayed there at *Ragagaha* on the *Vulture's Peak* he held that comprehensive religious talk with the brethren on the nature of upright conduct, and of earnest contemplation, and of intelligence. 'Great is the fruit, great the advantage of earnest contemplation, when set round with upright conduct. Great is the fruit, great the advantage of intellect, when set round with earnest contemplation. The mind set round with intelligence is freed from the great evils, that is to say, from sensuality, from individuality, from delusion, and from ignorance.'" (p. 11).

The description of the death of the Buddha, which occurs near the end of this *Sutta*, is worth quoting, though we must abridge it a little:

"Then the blessed one addressed the brethren, and said: 'Behold, now,

¹ See Rhys Davids' *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 34, 46.

brethren, I exhort you, saying, Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence!

"This was the last word of the Tathagata [one of the titles of the Buddha].

"Then the blessed one entered into the first stage of deep meditation. And rising out of the first stage he passed into the second. And rising out of the second, he passed into the third. And rising out of the third stage, he passed into the fourth. And rising out of the fourth stage of deep meditation, he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of space is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of space, he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of thought is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of thought, he entered into a state of mind to which nothing at all was specially present. And passing out of the consciousness of no special object, he fell into a state between consciousness and unconsciousness. And passing out of the state between consciousness and unconsciousness, he fell into a state in which the consciousness both of sensations and of ideas had wholly passed away.

"Then the venerable Ananda said to the venerable Anuruddha; 'Oh my Lord, O Anuruddha, the blessed one is dead!'

"'Nay! brother Ananda, the blessed one is not dead; he has entered into that state in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be.'

"Then the blessed one, passing out of the state in which both sensations and ideas have ceased to be, entered into the state between consciousness and unconsciousness. [And then he traverses in an order the reverse of that given above the successive stages, until he arrives at the first stage of deep meditation.] And passing out of the first stage of deep meditation, he entered into the second. And passing out of the second stage, he entered into the third. And passing out of the third stage, he entered into the fourth stage of deep meditation. And passing out of the last stage of deep meditation, he immediately expired.

"When the blessed one died there arose, at the moment of his passing out of existence, a mighty earthquake, terrible and awe-inspiring; and the thunders of heaven burst forth" (pp. 114 ff.).

This is followed by several paragraphs in which Brahma Sahampati, Sakka the king of the gods, the venerable Anuruddha, and the venerable Ananda, successively bewailed the death of the Buddha; and these again by others detailing the grief of the disciples generally. The whole account is exceedingly interesting, but too long to be quoted.

We turn now to the Dhamma-kakka-ppavattana-Sutta, or the Sutta of the Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness. This contains the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the very core and essence of Buddhism. It is the germ from which the entire system has been evolved; thus it is of sufficient importance to warrant a long quotation:

"Now this, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning suffering. Birth is attended with pain; decay is painful; disease is painful; death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful; painful is separation from the pleasant; and any craving that is unsatisfied, that, too, is painful. In brief, the five aggregates which spring from attachment (the conditions of individuality and their cause) are painful.

"This then, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning suffering.

"Now this, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering. Verily, it is that thirst (or craving), causing the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there—that is to say, the craving for the gratification of the passions, or the craving for (a future) life, or the craving for success (in this present life).

"This, then, O Bhikkus is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering.

"Now this, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering. Verily, it is the destruction, in which no passion remains, of this very thirst; the laying aside of, the getting rid of, the being free from, the harboring no longer of this thirst.

"This, then, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering.

"Now this, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning the way which leads to the destruction of sorrow. Verily, it is this noble eightfold path; that is to say, right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation.

"This, then, O Bhikkus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of sorrow" (pp. 148 ff.).

But here our extracts must cease. We need only add, as we close this volume, that it is one of no small interest to the intelligent reader, as well as of very much value to the historian, or to the student of comparative religion. The name of the translator will be a sufficient guarantee of accuracy of rendering; and the English style is not only exceedingly appropriate to the subject matter, being both chaste and lofty in diction, but is also in itself elegant, sometimes even eloquent. As a whole, we consider this volume more readable than any that have preceded it in this series. This is due partly to the excellence of the translator's work, and partly to the subject matter of the book. A similar remark, we imagine, can be made regarding Buddhist literature in general, as compared with that either of Hinduism or Zoroastrianism. Next to the Buddhist books we should be inclined to place those of Muhammadanism.