

# THE CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN.

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## MODERN UNBELIEF AND BUDDHISM.

THE interest that has been taken of late in Buddhism by a large number of intelligent people in various Christian countries, is one of the marked phenomena of our day. In America, this interest prevailed for a considerable time among the somewhat restricted number of those who have known—or have thought that they knew—something about Buddhism; but since 1879, through the publication of Mr. Arnold's poem, "The Light of Asia," the popularity of the subject has in a marked degree increased. Many who would have been repelled by any formal, dryly philosophical treatise upon Buddhism have been attracted to it by the charm of Mr. Arnold's poetry. A cheap American reprint, selling for fifteen cents—sevenpence halfpenny—has helped to make such information as Mr. Arnold was supposed to be able to impart, accessible to a still greater number, who were not as yet sufficiently interested in the matter to have cared to pay much more. And so it has come to pass that we find everywhere among reading and intelligent people a very considerable number who think that they now know a little about the Buddha and his religion, and have found awakened in their minds—often quite unexpectedly to themselves—a very surprising interest in this "venerable religion" which Mr. Arnold has presented to the English-reading public in such an attractive guise.

Among these we find here and there some Christian people, who seem to be somewhat disquieted by what they have learned—or think they have learned—concerning Buddhism. They have met with so much in the story of the Buddha and in his teachings which they had formerly supposed to be peculiar to Christianity, that a feeling arises—as I have frequently had occasion to observe—of anxiety, lest the evidence for the supernatural origin of the Christian religion be thereby in some degree weakened. The case of such we have endeavoured elsewhere—in part at least—to meet,\* and we do not propose to dwell upon that phase of the matter in the present article.

\* In the "Bibliotheca Sacra," Andover, Mass., U.S.A., July, 1882: article, "The Legend of the Buddha and the Story of the Christ."

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There are others, however, who are not at all troubled by fears of this sort, and that not because of any special strength of faith in the Divine origin of the religion of Christ. As to this, indeed, many of them appear to care but very little. They feel, however, a keenly sympathetic interest in the religion of the Buddha, and in all that relates to it,—much more, in fact, than they seem to feel in the doctrine and story of Christ; and they are ready to echo with unconcealed satisfaction the laudations which Mr. Arnold and those of his way of thinking have lavished upon the religion which, in their judgment, is “The Light of Asia.” A curious phenomenon, indeed, is this, that the century which began with sending missionaries to convert the Buddhists, should ere its close see a generation arise which, if one may judge from the expressions of some, is itself almost or quite converted to the faith of the Buddha. It is proposed in the present article to indicate some of the chief causes which, in the judgment of the writer, have served to excite among the unbelievers in Christianity in our day, such a peculiar interest in this hoary system of error.

1. First among these causes may be named the extent to which Buddhism, in some form or other, for two thousand years, has been accepted by men as the solution of the enigma of life. It had, indeed, long been known in a general way that the Chinese, Siamese, Thibetans, and many other Asiatic peoples held the Buddhist faith, so that its adherents were very numerous. But latterly, through the great increase of Eastern travel and of popular literature giving the experiences of Western travellers and residents in oriental lands, the general public has come to *realise*, as never before, the truly wonderful fact that at this late day, after eighteen hundred years of Christianity, out of 1,400,000,000, more than 400,000,000 of the human family profess to accept Buddhism as the true religion and philosophy of existence,—a number which, on any estimate, is considerably greater than can be claimed for the followers of any other religion. It can hardly be doubted that, with a considerable number of men and women who have no decided faith in Christianity, and yet are not quite at ease without any religion at all, this mere fact of the numerical strength of Buddhism has no little influence in disposing them to a sympathetic attention to its claims. The fact is indeed remarkable, and well deserves attention, whatever be its explanation. But an increasing number in this democratic age are disposed to something like a deification of majorities. Assuming the essential goodness of human nature, it is argued in politics, for example, that the voice of the majority, expressed at the polls, may fairly be presumed to be in the right. *Vox populi, vox Dei*. Why should not the same principle apply also in the sphere of religion? Why is it not probable that the religion which, after centuries of trial, commands the largest suffrage of any religion among men should be the religion which is nearest right? In this way, there is reason to suspect that, by not a few, the fact that Buddhism

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numbers more than 400,000,000 adherents is felt to be an argument of no inconsiderable force in favour of a religion which, after a long trial, can command a suffrage so extensive. At least the argument is held sufficient to throw a strong presumption in its favour as opposed to Christianity.

2. Again, the wide acceptance of various theories of evolution of an atheistic type should probably be named as another element contributing to that sympathetic interest in the Buddhist system which is exhibited in the antichristian camp. As every one knows, there are many who think that if a theory of evolution be proven, then the hypothesis of Creator becomes a superfluity. As if the discovery of the *method* of the formation of the universe, or of anything, relieved us from the necessity of supposing a *cause*! Such thinkers, of course, can have no patience with a religion which teaches that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and that the soul of man was not developed from that of an ape, but "breathed into him" by God. Such a religion, with its doctrine of a God and of supernatural interventions, seems to thinkers of the class described to stand in the way of all true scientific progress; and so assuming, with quiet assurance, for their science an infallibility which they will not hear of in a religion, they argue that no religion can stand which opposes their theory of things. On the other hand, to such men Buddhism must seem, as compared with Christianity, a far more reasonable religion. In the first place, it has no God in it to interfere with the eternal continuity of the evolution process. As Köppen has well put it, "Buddhism recognises no eternal Being, only an eternal Becoming."\* So far from having in it no place for their theory of evolution, it has fully recognised a theory of evolution, and raised it to the dignity of a religion. It teaches that all that is is simply the result of an evolution from a previous state of things, as that from one before, and so on by a process of which no beginning is even thinkable. In full accord with the antitheistic type of evolution, Buddhism denies any impassable gulf between the irrational animals and man. A pig may become a man,—not, indeed, in the sense of the Western evolutionist, but not less truly.† The nature of the connection between the different forms of life in such a case is no doubt conceived of in Buddhism in a manner very different from the modern European fashion; but still the essential continuity between all forms of life on which the modern theories of evolution so strongly insist is fully recognised. Not to elaborate this matter further, it is plain that in these facts is revealed a bond of sympathy between modern antichristian thought and the Buddhist philosophy which goes far toward accounting for the interest in Buddhism which is displayed in the sceptical camp.

\* "Es giebt nur ein ewiges Werden, kein ewiges Sein."—KÖPPEN, *Die Religion des Buddhas*, p. 230.

† The Buddha is actually said to have once been a pig!

3. Closely connected with the modern enthusiasm over Buddhism is the disposition of the age to glory in man, his immeasurable possibilities of development in power and knowledge. It is felt that no one may venture to say what man may not do or may not become, all by his own unaided powers. The Scriptures do not deny that there is a glory in man, and possibilities of unimagined greatness; but they also affirm an abasement as well as a glory, weakness as well as strength, ignorance to be removed by none but God. The possibilities of glory which it sets before man are not for man as he *naturally* is; they are not to be attained by any *mere* exercise of his natural powers, but only as through faith he shall come into a vital union with the God-Man, Christ Jesus. Let man refuse that faith, and already he is sentenced to an ignominious future, and the eternal disappointment of all his proud aspirations. In that point of view the Scripture cries: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils! for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Nothing could well be more repellent to the boastful spirit of our age than such a doctrine as this. But men who, filled with the nineteenth century spirit of self-glorification, are for that reason repelled from Christianity, are for the same reason attracted to Buddhism. Where the Gospel tells us of a God who became man,—a doctrine in all ages foolishness to the wise of this world,—Buddhism tells of a man who became God, even the Buddha, who under the Bo-tree attained all power and all knowledge! It tells us with emphasis that the Buddha, who attained all this, attained it by his own unaided strength and merit; and, moreover, that any man who will take the same way, may attain to the same heights. How completely the idea of man which Buddhism thus expresses falls in with the spirit of our modern materialists, positivists, and all who, like such, in theory or fact make man a god! And when men of this age, impatient above all things of any assertion of the supernatural, who will hear nothing of a miracle, find that the most stupendous wonders are said to have been performed by this Buddha, and to be within the power of all who will follow him in toilsome labour and self-discipline, however incredulous they may be of such stories, they feel themselves in full accord with the spirit of naturalism and human deification which such stories express; and, perhaps, intoxicated with the whirl of progress in physical science, half dream that very possibly some such marvellous power over nature as is attributed to the Buddha and the *arhats*, may yet be reached—if not by the transcendental methods of the Buddhists, yet by the slower and surer processes of modern science.

4. Not only the atheism of the Buddhist system thus variously illustrated, but also the special type of its atheism, helps to gain for it a friendly consideration from modern western sceptics. The atheism which is just now in fashion is not dogmatic and affirmative, but modest, negative, agnostic. It will not say: "There is no God;" but rather, with Mr. Herbert Spencer, "The power which is manifested in

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the universe is utterly inscrutable." But this seems to be the exact attitude of Buddhism. There are passages, indeed, in the Buddhist authorities which deny and argue against the being of a God; but as to what the real cause of the eternal succession of worlds may be, Buddhism holds a strictly agnostic position. We read: "There is one thing which is not in the dominion of the intellect; namely, to know whence come all the beings of the universe, and whither they go."\* Not merely as atheistic, then, but as agnostic, does Buddhism find sympathising advocates among the agnostic atheists of Christendom.

But atheism and agnosticism both alike, if a man have the logic in him to see the inevitable conclusions of the system, lead straight on to Pessimism. And so it has naturally come to pass, that under the influence of the atheistic and agnostic speculation of the day, a considerable number here and there have come sadly to doubt whether in life the pain do not quite outweigh the pleasure; and thus, whether it be not better not to be than to exist in such a universe as this. As all our readers know, this hopeless Pessimism has found earnest, often passionate, expounders of late years in such as Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and these have their disciples. All who are affected with this malady of our time must, for this reason again, listen to the words of the Buddha with a lively sympathy. For, as is now generally well known, he makes the absolute universality of sorrow to be the first of the "Four Noble Truths" which are the fundamental articles of the Buddhist creed. It is written: "This, O monks, is the holy truth concerning suffering. Death is suffering; old age is suffering; sickness is suffering; to be united with what is not loved is suffering; to be parted from what is loved is suffering; not to attain one's desires is suffering." And to such words of the Buddha not a few, alas, in Christendom, having lost sight of Him Who is the Light of the world, sigh their sad Amen, and not unnaturally think the Buddha, who has so voiced their deepest feeling, must have been very wise!

5. We must add, of course, that Buddhism attracts very many by its remarkable system of ethics. This has been often said, and scarcely needs to be argued. And every candid person will freely admit that in the Buddhist ethics, regarded merely as an external system, there is indeed much to admire; and that among the various religions of the non-Christian world, it may be justly held, in this respect, to stand alone. It is not, therefore, strange that it should have gained a degree of admiration accorded to no other system, unless it be the Christian. But, if we mistake not, it is not the theoretic excellence of Buddhist ethics in itself that attracts the admiration, and so calls forth the praises of our modern unbelievers in the Gospel; but rather the fact that such a moral system,—the only one which, in the opinion of many, may fairly claim to be compared with that of the New Testament,—

\* Quoted by A. Rémusat (Mel. posth. 121) from an ancient Buddhist *Sūtra*. See Köppen, *Die Religion des Buddha*, s. 231.

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should belong to the one religion which is at the furthest possible remove from the religion of Christ, a religion which actually has in it no place for the being of a God! To find such a system of morals in such a religion fills a certain class of minds with undisguised delight. For there are obvious symptoms of uneasy apprehensions arising of late among the apostles of unbelief. More and more frequently, as the anti-theism of the day has spread among the masses, have been appearing in our time ugly symptoms seeming to suggest that, very possibly, with the old faith in God and a hereafter, even morality may go down too. Hence the question has been raised and debated with warmth on both sides, whether, if God be denied or left out of life, there will be left a basis for practical morals; whether the *purely secular* type of society, which is the professed ideal and aim of many, can possibly be a *moral* society. Some unbelievers have been frank enough to say that, notwithstanding the publication of Mr. Spencer's "Data of Ethics," such an atheistic rendition of the moral law as shall commend itself to general acceptance as a substitute for the Christian, in the expected day when Christianity shall have vanished from the earth (!), is yet to be elaborated; and that, just at present, when the modern scientific view of the world is gaining adherents so fast, and the old code of morals thereby losing its authority, based as it is on the idea of a God, the construction of a practicable system of morals upon a purely scientific basis is a desideratum of the first consequence. And, while all profess a confidence that "evolution" will probably bring out all right in the end, some have suggested that we may not unreasonably anticipate a kind of moral interregnum in the modern world during a period in which, God having been dethroned from His place in the minds of men, no sanction has been discovered adequate to take the place of His authority. To such anxious souls the ethics of Buddhism seem to be full of comfort. The Buddhist system is not, of course, supposed to be adapted altogether to the present "environment"; but it is thought by some to settle this at least, that morals are not inseparable from a belief in God, and that a moral law even of a high order may be recognised where there is no faith in God at all. In this point of view, we can understand the special enthusiasm of the unbelievers of Christendom over the moral character of the Buddha. The singular beauty and attractiveness of the character of the Buddha, as set forth in the most trustworthy records, may be freely admitted without indulging in the strange exaggeration of Mr. Arnold, who, in the Preface to "The Light of Asia," ventures the assertion that "the Buddhist books agree in the one point of recording no single word or deed, act or word, which mars the perfect purity and tenderness of this Indian teacher."\* While accessible facts should have

\* Such an assertion constrains us to suppose that Mr. Arnold's reading could not have been so extensive as was to be desired. To go no further, Professor Bell's "Romantic Legend," a translation of the Chinese version of the *Abhinishkramana Sūtra*, would have given him abundant reason for qualifying this misleading statement.

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prevented him from making any such statement as this, they do certainly warrant us in ranking the Buddha as among the greatest and noblest of men,—one who seems to have lived and laboured, however mistakenly, in order that he might, if possible, lighten the miseries of his fellow-men. Yet he was a man who never by any act or word showed any recognition of the being of God! and thus, from the unbelieving point of view, he affords a living argument to show that not only theoretical but practical morality of a high type may be realised where there is no faith in God. No wonder, under the circumstances of the time, that men with whom the authority of the decalogue is seen to have gone with the faith in God, find a wonderful comfort in the ethics of Buddhism and in the life of its founder. Perhaps, we may add without stopping to argue, that the comfort might be seriously diminished if they would observe the practical operation of the atheistic ethics of the Buddha in China, Siam, and other lands where the system has had a fair and prolonged trial!

6. Again, modern unbelief is distinguished for its utter contempt for all authority. It will have all things settled by the processes of exact science,—commonly meaning by this, of course, physical science; and what cannot be thus proven, what has nothing but authority, as of a professed revelation, behind it,—for that it has no patience,—it is turned over at once to the limbo of superstition, or consigned to the abyss of the unknowable. As naturally as in all else, Buddhism stands to such men commended by the whole history of its origin. However modern Buddhists may have come to bow servilely to the teaching of the Buddha, in the beginning, Buddhism, as every one knows, was a revolt against priestly authority. It began by rejecting *in toto* the whole Brahmanical system of pretended revelations. As for the Buddha, he had indeed *knowledge* to communicate to men, but *not a revelation*. He did not, therefore, assume an authoritative air, and denounce penalties against all who would not receive his message. He spoke “as a plain man,” who himself had sought for rest and found it,—found it without the help of Brahman priest or any so-called revelation whatsoever. Such a religion as this, based in its very origin upon a revolt against the idea of authority in religion, stands of necessity by that fact so far commended to all whose proud minds cannot endure that word of Christ, “Come unto me all ye that labour . . . take *my yoke* upon you, and learn of me.”

7. Another circumstance which has doubtless had a degree of influence,—more, indeed, among the superficial than among the best informed in Oriental matters,—in enlisting the interest of sceptics in the Buddhist religion, has been the number of supposed agreements both in the Buddhist doctrines and, especially in the story of the Buddha, with the doctrines and the history of Christ and the early days of the Christian religion. At these the unbelief of the day has grasped eagerly, and with an exultation which already, as regards very many

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points, has been proved to be premature, has loudly welcomed Buddhism as an ally by whose help it might be shown that Strauss and his followers were right after all; that the Gospel story was only a Palestinian version of old Indian myths; its doctrines only a Judaized Buddhism; its very narrative bearing sometimes verbal traces of its Buddhist origin! It is not within the scope of the present article to argue these points. It will suffice to remark that the most eminent Buddhist scholars utterly repudiate the idea of any such genetic connection between either the legend or the doctrines of the Buddha and the Gospel of Christ as certain unbelievers are so anxious to make out.

As regards supposed verbal agreements, the case is no less strong. Mr. Edwin Arnold, whether with or without intention, has done much to suggest to the public mind the reality of such verbal agreements between the Buddhist and the Gospel story. Indeed, if the Germans speak of a certain type of criticism as "Tendenz-Criticismus," we may with equal right speak of the Light of Asia as a "Tendency-Poem"—none the less so, though we assume that the author was unconscious of the tendency of his work. Illustrations are numerous. Thus we read that when the aged Asita blessed the infant Buddha, he said to his mother, in words nearly the same as Luke ii. 35—

". . . A sword must pierce  
Thy bowels for this boy."

Again, when Buddha declares his resolution to forsake all, that he may accomplish his mission, we read—

"I will depart, he spake; the hour is come!

. . . . . Unto this  
Came I, and unto this all nights and days  
Have led me.\* . . .

This will I do who have a realm to lose,  
Because I love my realm. . . .

. . . . . These that are mine, and those  
Which shall be mine, a thousand million more,  
Saved by this sacrifice I offer now"†

While he was wandering, seeking the knowledge which brings relief from sorrow, we are told—

". . . The Lord paced in meditation lost,  
Thinking, Alas! for all my sheep which have  
No shepherd; wandering in the night, with none  
To guide them."‡

In the great temptation by Mara, we are told that the tempter addressed him with the words, in accord with Luke iv. iii.—

"If thou beest Buddh;"

\* Cf. John xii. 23, 27.

† Cf. John xvii. 20.

‡ Cf. Matt. ix. 36; and John x., especially verses 14-16.



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and afterward, that in the retrospect of his life, he saw where his path had often led

“ . . . On dizzy ridges where his feet  
Had well-nigh slipped.”\*

Other instances might be given of the same general character, but these will suffice.

It would be an interesting, and in many ways a suggestive task, did the scope of this article permit, to compare with the actual expressions in various Buddhist authorities, those which, in the above and other instances, *poetic license* has led Mr. Arnold to take. We can only remark, however, that so far as the various authorities accessible have enabled us to judge, very few, if any, of the verbal agreements with the Christian Scriptures which Mr. Arnold's poem has been made to suggest, can be sustained by facts. In the interests of truth we would, in any case, ask Mr. Arnold to give to the public at an early date an edition of his “Light of Asia,” embodying references to authorities wherein a warrant for these verbal coincidences may be found. Meantime, however, such unverified, and—if we mistake not—for the most part wholly unjustifiable suggestions, have their force with people not over well-informed in these things, and are doing their work. We are persuaded that the strong New Testament colouring which has been given by some to the Buddhist story, has done not a little to stimulate the remarkable interest with which the sceptical world has come to regard all that pertains to the religion of the Buddha. The authority of Strauss and the critics of the Tübingen school has been of late at a considerable discount among intelligent men, so that those who would reject the testimony of the gospels have come to need sorely a new show of reason for so doing, and have fancied, it would appear, that they had found—or might possibly find it—in the story and religion of the Buddha.

This subject is suggestive in many ways, but we add only a single thought. The tendency to union among the followers of Christ is one of the most conspicuous facts of our age,—one which, in particular, the Presbyterian Alliance very happily and impressively represents. Everywhere we see various bodies of Christians, long sundered, seeking now to know each other better, and as far as possible to unite upon essentials for practical work in the great conflict against Satan's kingdom. But the same tendency is to be observed also on the anti-Christian side. It is illustrated by the phenomena reviewed in this article. The modern heathenism in Christendom, and the ancient systems of the East, are discovering each their inward mutual affinity, and betray a growing sympathy with each other. But here and in the East we see the modern anti-Christian philosophies of Europe, and the hoary heathen philosophies of Asia, joining hands for a united opposition to the truth of Christ. The more that this becomes evident, the stronger becomes the argument for Christian union, and in particular the consolidation,

\* Cf. Psalm lxxiii. 2.

in all practical ways, of the Presbyterian forces for organised work against the heathenism at home and that of the foreign field. So the immense forces on either side seem to be uniting and preparing for a conflict, no longer in detachments here and there, but universal, and—may we not hope?—final, the spiritual Armageddon of the ages, a last conflict for the kingdom of the world! And on which side the victory shall be, however and whenever brought about, no true follower of the Lord Jesus doubts.

S. H. KELLOGG.

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## THOMAS CARTWRIGHT AND ENGLISH PRESBYTERIANISM.

THE recent publication of the second volume of the "Reformation of the Church of England," by the Rev. John Henry Blunt, M.A., F.S.A., must be our apology for looking back to times long gone by—for looking back more than three centuries. Although occasionally confused, prolix, and illogical, the work is of respectable merit. It covers the period from 1547 to 1662, and therefore marks the origin of Presbyterianism in England, and the secession of two thousand Puritan ministers, most of them Presbyterians, who had ministered in the churches of the Church of England. Mr. Blunt belongs to a class of clergymen who, as Archbishop Sumner well said, "sit in the chairs of the Reformers, and traduce the Reformation." In his opinion Protestantism, Puritanism, and Presbyterianism are, "in reality, as strongly antagonistic to the fundamental principles of the Church of England as to those of the Church of Rome." After a most unfair summary of the character of Cranmer, the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, he adds: "Happily for the Reformation, Archbishop Cranmer was not a Presbyterian by birth and country, and so was not so distinctly a foe to the Church of England as some of her later rulers have been." Opinions so startling as these make us rub our eyes, and wonder where we are. One thing is certain—England owes her civil and religious liberty not to High Churchmen, who played the game of Rome, but to Puritan Churchmen, who demanded that ecclesiastical authority should be vested, not in the Crown, but in the Church; and who believed that Presbyters, in Synod assembled, had the power claimed by bishops, and desired relief for tender consciences. Cartwright, a Cambridge Professor of Theology, was the leader of this party; and all Protestants, and especially all Presbyterians, ought to be familiar with this root-and-branch Reformer, to whom Mr. Blunt devotes only one sentence.

In the present paper we shall give first a brief outline of his life; then we shall notice the Presbyterian principles which he maintained, adverting in conclusion to his spirit and character.