



human. When this belief becomes a conviction, the eating of flesh meat must seem to the believer to be akin to cannibalism. It is strange that this feeling finds so little expression in the legend of Gótama; on the contrary, Gótama is said to have died in consequence of having eaten too much pork. But it is easy to infer from the edicts that the legend of his biography was compiled in a later and corrupt age of Buddhism, and cannot be accepted as a faithful picture of his life and teaching. Be this as it may, Raja Priyadarsi was no monk. He was a philanthropist of a practical stamp, and imbued with a deep love of animal beings. Probably he had eaten flesh meat from his boyhood, without a thought of the nature of the animal he was eating, or of the misery which was inflicted to procure his daily meal. Like other Hindú sovereigns he had also performed sacrifices of animals to the gods, without a thought of the death to which the creature was subjected. But when he realized the pain and suffering caused by such butchery, his heart seems to have revolted from flesh, in the same way that a woman revolts from the idea of eating a pet lamb or bird. Accordingly he promulgated an edict, in which he prohibited all slaughter of animals, whether for food or sacrifice, because of the cruelty which it involved. He also announced that the daily slaughter of animals in the royal kitchen would be discontinued for the future. In the same edict he prohibited all convivial meetings on the ground that much evil attended such assemblies.⁵

Perhaps no despotic order has been issued, since

⁵ See Tablet i. in Appendix I.



CHAPTER V. the first establishment of a civil government, which was so calculated to create a profound impression. The Bráhmans, however abstemious in their own diet, had sacrificed animals, and poured out libations to the gods, from immemorial antiquity. The Kshatriyas were equally celebrated as warriors and hunters, and had lived on meat and wine from their earliest history. The edict was thus directed against the daily worship of the Bráhmans and the daily pursuits and daily meals of the Kshatriyas; whilst it was based upon broad principles of benevolence, which neither priest nor soldier could be expected to understand. The Bráhman would never regard his sacrificial knife as an instrument of cruelty; nor was the Kshatriya likely to desist from the sports of the field, or to abstain from his ancient flesh feasts, because of the pain they might inflict on the antelope or wild boar.

Failure of the edict.

The promulgation of the first edict against the slaughter of animals thus appears to have been a failure. The general population of the Gangetic valley might possibly have received it with indifference, for they had subsisted on grain and vegetables for unrecorded ages; but still they had always sacrificed animals to the gods, and especially to the female deities who were supposed to revel in flesh meat and strong liquors.⁶

Enforcement of the edict by an imperial demonstration.

The Raja, however, was not to be thwarted in his benevolent intentions by the opposition or disaffection of unbelievers. He repeated the edict in another form, and promulgated it with all the pomp and ceremony of an imperial demonstration. This

⁶ See the vows of Sítá to the goddesses of the Ganges and Jumna rivers, *ante*, page 47.



time it was not associated with the decree against convivial entertainments, but placed foremost amongst those precepts of duty which had received universal recognition. Again, it was not issued as an ordinary decree, but surrounded with all the emblems of power and authority that would excite universal reverence, and ensure universal obedience. Magnificent spectacles were exhibited at every important station throughout the empire, such as the people had not witnessed for centuries. There were grand processions of elephants and chariots, accompanied by imposing displays of rich and costly articles, and winding up with fire-works and illuminations. Vast assemblages of people were thus gathered together in orderly but overwhelming multitudes, such as are still to be witnessed at the great Indian festivals. The drums were beaten and proclamation was made by a special messenger from the sovereign. "Thus saith the Raja:⁷—'Animals are not to be sacrificed, living creatures are not to be put to death, kinsfolk are to be kindly regarded, Bráhmans and Srámans are to be respected and revered, fathers and mothers are to be dutifully served, and spiritual pastors are to be received with filial veneration: By these righteous observances the religion of the heaven-beloved Raja will flourish throughout the world; and under his sons, and his grandsons, and his great-grandsons, it will prosper throughout all generations: It is the ordinance of duty and should be as stable as a mountain: Let every virtuous man obey it: Let no man think of opposing it: The law which di-

⁷ The name of the Raja, and his appellation of "heaven-beloved" or "beloved of the gods," is repeated in every edict.



CHAPTER V. reects ceremonial rites must conform to the ordinance of duty.'"⁸

Significance of the prohibition.

Raja Priyadarsi is perhaps the first sovereign on record who authoritatively declared that the national religion must conform to justice and humanity. Gótama Buddha had already brought his monastic teaching into conformity with moral duty by prohibiting sons to enter upon monastic vows without the consent of their parents. But Raja Priyadarsi aimed a mortal blow at the old Brahmanical ritual by asserting that the sacrifice of animals was contrary to humanity. In enforcing this decree he did not appeal to any religious sentiment, such as precludes the Bráhmaṇ from eating beef, or the Mussulman from eating pork. He did not refer to the dogma of the metempsychosis, which taught that animals were mere embodiments of human souls. He did not even prohibit animal food, but only the slaughter of the animal.⁹ But the force of the appeal to humanity against the bloody ritual was irresistible. A powerful antagonism was excited which lasted for ages; but in the end humanity triumphed over the Bráhmaṇ and the Kshatriya. In the present day animal sacrifices have almost passed away from

⁸ See Appendix, Tablet iv. The paraphrase will appear somewhat free if it is only compared with Professor Wilson's translation of Tablet iv.; but it will be found in perfect conformity with the real meaning of the inscription as exhibited in Professor Wilson's comments on the original text of the edict. See *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xii., page 180. Speaking of the last sentence, Professor Wilson says that it is intended to raise moral duty above ceremonial rites.

⁹ This point has already been discussed, see *ante*, page 142.

It is curious to notice the contrast between the practical working of the Buddhist commandment against slaughter, and that against getting drunk. Although killing is forbidden, the Buddhist may still eat meat, provided the animal has been killed by another, or has died a natural or accidental death. But the law against getting drunk is treated as a prohibition against all intoxicating liquors and drugs.



India; they have been superseded by the more CHAPTER V.
innocent offerings of rice and milk, butter and cakes,
such as the ancient Rishis presented to the gods of
the elements.¹⁰ In like manner the royal and im-
perial sacrifices of the Rajasúya and Aswamedha
have disappeared from the land; and although the
love of the chase is still as strong in the Kshatriya
as in days of yore, yet the national sentiment of the
Hindú is opposed to the idea of slaughter of any
living thing.¹¹

The edict for the establishment of medical dis-
pensaries or hospitals is of a still more remarkable
character. It is the expression of an enlightened
morality, which is a lesson for all time. It is the
embodiment of that practical benevolence, which
cares for the body as well as for the soul. The
Raja saw with that true philanthropy which grows
out of the religion of the affections, that health is
as essential to happiness as spiritual culture; and
accordingly, whilst seeking to inculcate religion or
Dharma, he provided the means for removing dis-
ease and pain from the temple of the body. Here,
again, his loving-kindness was not confined to the
human race, but extended over the entire range of
animal being. Mr Prinsep alludes to it as the fas-
tidious humanity of the Buddhist creed; but the alle-
viation of agony in animals, especially in those who

Medical estab-
lishments for
men and ani-
mals.

¹⁰ In Bengal goats and kids are still sacrificed to the goddess Kalí or Durgá.

¹¹ The antagonism of the Bráhmans to the milder precepts of Buddhism could scarcely have found much expression during the reign of a tolerant sovereign like Raja Priyadarsi. The author of the Vishnu Purána, which was composed in the age of Brahmanical revival, is exceedingly bitter against the Buddhists and Jains, who had seduced the people from their ancient sacrifices and sraddhas. (See Book iii. chap. xviii.) The transition from animal sacrifices to the bloodless offerings of rice and milk is fully indicated in the Rámáyana. See History, vol. ii., part iv., Rámáyana, chap. ii.



CHAPTER V. minister to man, is something more than fastidious humanity. To bind a broken limb, to anoint a wound, to bring a draught of water to a sick animal, will often elicit more gratitude from the dumb creature, than from beings gifted with speech and reason. The fact that the cure of disease formed a part of the ancient religion of Buddha, has already been indicated by Megasthenes, who describes the physicians as forming an honourable class of the Srámans, or Buddhist mendicants.

Character of
the edict.

It is impossible, however, to ascertain how far the labours of these Srámans were systematized by Raja Priyadarsi. The edict simply directed that a constant supply of medicinal roots and fruits should be kept in store in every part of his empire; one class for the treatment of human beings, and the other class for the treatment of animals.¹² This benevolent measure was also extended to all the provinces which had been conquered by Raja Priyadarsi; as well as to the Bactrian kingdom of Antiochus the Greek, with whom the Raja appears to have been in alliance. It was further enacted that wherever such a provision had not been made, the necessary roots and fruits were to be planted. In the same edict the Raja commanded that wells should be dug and trees planted on every high road throughout his empire, for the accommodation of animals as well as for that of man.¹³

¹² See *infra* for Fah-Hian's account of these hospitals at Patali-putra.

¹³ See Tablet ii. in Appendix 1. The conservative character of Hindú institutions may be inferred from the fact that there existed at Surat down to the last century a hospital specially set apart for the treatment of animals. It has been frequently described by European travellers, and was known as the Banyan Hospital; but nothing of it has been reported subsequent to the year 1780. In that year it consisted of a large piece of ground, enclosed by high walls, and subdivided into several courts or wards for the accommodation of



The edicts promulgated by Raja Priyadarsi, for establishing a system of moral instruction throughout his empire, are somewhat obscure.¹⁴ In one he complains that the chief ministers of morality had been "tolerant of iniquity;" and it may be assumed that by the term "iniquity" he alluded to the flesh sacrifices of the Bráhmans, and the flesh feasts and banquetings of the Kshatriyas. Accordingly he announces that he has appointed other ministers to mingle freely with all classes, with Kshatriyas and Bráhmans, as well as with mendicants and poor people,¹⁵ for the purpose of presiding over morals, and rewarding the good and punishing the wicked.¹⁶

CHAPTER V.
State system of moral instruction.

animals. In sickness they were attended with the greatest care, and here found what is wanted by many human beings, namely, a peaceful asylum for the infirmities of old age. When an animal broke a limb, or was otherwise disabled, his owner brought it to this hospital, where it was received without regard to the caste or nation of its master. In 1772 this hospital contained horses, mules, oxen, sheep, goats, monkeys, poultry, pigeons, and a variety of birds; also an aged tortoise, which was known to have been there seventy-five years. The most extraordinary ward was that appropriated for rats, mice, bugs, and other noxious vermin, for whom suitable food was provided (Hamilton's East India Gazetteer, *art.* Surat).

It would be difficult for the European to understand the inducement which would lead men to contribute towards the support of such an extraordinary institution whilst so many human beings were unprovided for. But the dogma of the metempsychosis undoubtedly exercises a deep influence when the belief becomes a conviction; and the doctrine would induce large numbers to purchase future happiness by such an affectation of charity.

¹⁴ See Tablets v. and vi. in Appendix I.

¹⁵ The term mendicants or "Bhikshus," does not appear to be applied to ordinary beggars, but to the religious mendicants, such as the Srámanas. In the legend of the life of Gótama Buddha, the great teacher is often represented as addressing his priests by the simple term of "Bhikshus" or mendicants.

¹⁶ In the original edict, which will be found in the Appendix (Tablet v.), will be found some geographical allusions, which suggest the idea that Raja Priyadarsi sent out missionaries to neighbouring countries. It is difficult to identify precisely the names of countries, but the missionaries seem to have been directed to proceed in a westerly direction into Guzerat; and also towards the north-west through Cashmere and Cabul, "to the outer cities and fastnesses of my brother and sister, and wherever there are any other of my kindred." By this last expression the edict seems to allude to the dominions of the Greek princes of Bactria. See Appendix II., Buddhist Chronicles.



CHAPTER V. In the second edict he seems to imply that he had invested these ministers or missionaries with inquisitorial and magisterial powers, similar to those which were exercised by the political inspectors described by Megasthenes.

Opposition to
Raja Priyadarsi.

These edicts appear to indicate that a spirit of antagonism was already at work against the Raja and his religion. He had, in fact, shared the fate of all reformers, who seek to impart religious instruction to the masses without the aid of the established priesthood. He had endeavoured to conciliate Bráhmans and Srámans by enjoining the duty of paying them respect and supporting them with alms; but he had offended the Bráhmans by his edicts against animal sacrifices, and he had not as yet recommended himself to the Srámans by recognizing the law of the wheel. Above all he had ignored the authority of both Bráhmans and Srámans as teachers of religion, and had, moreover, indicated that they too were wanting in a knowledge of Dharma. It is easy to conceive that by adopting such an attitude he would excite the wrath of every priest and monk throughout the land. He would probably learn from his inspectors that loud murmurs were to be heard in all directions respecting the oppressive character of the new ordinances; and in the first instance he would be doubtless angry at such groundless complaints, and more determined than ever to enforce obedience to his commands.¹⁷ Under such circumstances he is said to

¹⁷ It is evident from the spirit of the edicts that the chief opposition to the ordinances of Raja Priyadarsi arose from those who desired to slaughter animals for sacrifice or food. This is especially evident even in the confused rendering of Tablet xiii. as given in the Appendix I.



have declared that he had not required his subjects to perform anything that he did not perform himself; and that consequently there would be no real difficulty in obeying his edicts.¹⁸ At the same time he announced his resolution to enforce obedience. For this purpose he had appointed officers to punish all those who departed from his ordinances. The tribunal thus set up partook of the nature of an Inquisition; but it was evidently intended for the punishment of evil conduct only, and not for the purpose of checking false doctrine or heresy of any kind.¹⁹

The remaining edicts are more conciliatory in their tone and character. The Raja seems to have failed, as might have been expected, in the task of compelling his subjects to become virtuous by imperial authority; and like some modern philanthropists, he appears to have been somewhat disconcerted by the result. Accordingly he attempted to set himself right with his subjects by appealing to the piety of his own life as compared with that of the Rajas who reigned before him. He says:—"In ancient times my predecessors on the throne took their pleasure in travelling, in society, in hunting and other similar amusements; but my delight has been in almsgiving and visits to the Bráhmans and Srámans, and in rewarding the learned and the aged; in overseeing the country and the people; in promul-

Conciliatory
edicts.

¹⁸ This point is rather dubious. It is so stated in the original rendering of Edict vi. by Mr Prinsep; but it finds no place in the revised translation by Professor Wilson.

¹⁹ It will be seen hereafter that the two Chinese pilgrims, Fah-Hian and Hsien-Tsang, testify to the fact that neglect of duties to parents and religious teachers was punished in the fifth and seventh centuries by mutilation and exile.



CHAPTER V. gating moral laws and enforcing moral conduct.”²⁰

Other edicts are of a similar character, but seem to offer considerable difficulties in the way of intelligible translation.²¹ It is evident, however, that the sovereign, whilst endeavouring to spread his own religion, was willing to tolerate the religion of others, and to praise all benevolent and virtuous acts even when practised by heretics. He honoured all forms of faith, and presented gifts to all holy men, whether monastic celibates or priestly householders; but he considered that there was no gift like that of virtue or Dharma. He especially gloried in the fact that his edicts effected conversions wherever they were set up. “It is a conquest,” he says, “that ensures joy, and becomes a joy: The victory of Dharma is the only true happiness, and cannot be overcome.”²²

Vitality of
Dharma as the
religion of lov-
ing-kindness.

Such was the good and kindly teaching of Raja Priyadarsi. This virtuous sovereign had gloried in the idea that his religion of Dharma would prosper throughout all generations, and endure as long as the mountains; and, practically, his aspirations have been realized. The religion of the heart has been struggling through unrecorded ages beneath the dead weight of an ecclesiastical system which ignores the affections, and the corrupt influence of a sacred literature which overrides morality. But such is the vitality of the doctrine of loving-kindness, that it still reigns supreme amidst the wreck of ancient creeds and expiring mythologies. The edicts have long since faded out of the national memory, but they were engraven not only on rock

²⁰ See Appendix. Tablet viii.

²¹ See Appendix, Tablets vii., xii., xiii., and xiv.

²² Tablet xiii.



and pillar, but on the hearts of the masses. In India the further development of Dharma has been repressed by Brahmanical observances, and the people are still distributed by caste distinctions into isolated groups; but within the little circle of family, village, caste, or neighbourhood, the religion flourishes to an extent which is without a parallel elsewhere. To this day the Hindús are beyond all other people in the world in dutiful service to father and mother, in kindness and kindly help towards kinsfolk and acquaintance, in filial veneration towards spiritual pastors, in respectful service towards Brahmans and holy men, in frugality and temperance, in abstinence from evil-speaking and slandering, and in a tender regard for the whole animal creation. In Buddhist countries²³ the duty of obedience to parents is less observed, and the virtue of benevolence loses its vitality from being regarded as a religious merit to be rewarded hereafter; but the duties of kindness and hospitality are more manifest, because they are not blunted by Brahmanical rapacity, or narrowed down by caste laws, and consequently have developed into a universal rule. Indeed Dharma has become almost identical with Buddhism. The traveller, whether a Burman or a foreigner, is always sure of a hospitable reception in a Buddhist monastery. Again, a system of instruction, such as was perhaps originally inaugurated by Raja Priyadarsi, is still in force in every vihára throughout Burma; and whether in British or native territory, it is difficult to find a Burman lad of the poorest parents who cannot read

²³ The author's personal experience of Buddhist countries is confined to Burma.



CHAPTER V. and write. Moreover the spirit of religious toleration which was expressed by Raja Priyadarsi, seems always to have prevailed both in India and Burma. Violation of caste rules within the pale of Brahmanism, and schism or heresy within the pale of Buddhism, may have been suppressed by excommunication or capital punishment in times gone by; but Jews and Christians, Mussulmans and Parsees, have always enjoyed the liberty of performing worship after their own fashion, without any interference whatever from the civil or ecclesiastical powers, provided always that no offence was given to the religion of the state.

Association
of Dharma with
Buddhism: de-
generation of
monastic Bud-
dhism.

This modern association of Dharma with Buddhism was not the result of monastic teaching, for theoretically the two systems are still as widely separated as they were in the days of Raja Priyadarsi. Dharma, or religion, cultivated the duties of the affections; Vināya, or monastic discipline, crushed out the affections themselves. Dharma taught that the fulfilment of duty to fellow-men and fellow-creatures in every scale of being was the only true road to happiness. Vināya taught that happiness itself is a delusion, and that the main object of the truly wise ought to be to abstract themselves from all duty and all affection, until the soul was freed from every mortal tie and practically ceased to be. But in the same way that Brahmanism has been compelled to accept the worship of the gods as practised by the conquerors and the conquered, so Buddhism has been compelled to accept the religion of Priyadarsi as taught in the edicts. From a very early date, probably during the period which intervened between the promulgation of the edicts and the



compilation of the chronicles, Buddhist monasticism must have been fast losing its ancient energy. The medical Srāmāns and the missionary Srāmāns, who are both so clearly described by Megasthenes, were virtually passing away from the Buddhist world; and the system of primary education, which is imparted in the monasteries to boys, is perhaps the last relic that remains of the vast philanthropic reforms which filled the imagination of the heaven-beloved Raja. In a word, from an early period the Buddhist monks must have degenerated. They led lives of celibacy in order that they might lead lives of religious idleness, maintained by the voluntary contributions of the laity, and surrounded by the halo of false glory with which superstition loves to invest such saintly characters.²⁴ Their vaunted learning has been little more than metaphysical speculation, in which ignorance of the universe and its inhabitants has been concealed under an affectation of profound knowledge that is drawn from the imagination alone. Nowhere is the real truth so plainly depicted as in the so-called Buddhist chronicles. There the dim memories of the past are reproduced in the garb of fable; and the want of historical data is supplied by puerile inventions.²⁵

The reign of Raja Priyadarsi is a valuable

²⁴ The unpractical character of monastic Buddhism is especially observant in Burma, for there it can be easily compared with the daily labours and self-denying lives of Roman Catholic priests and missionaries which are above all praise.

²⁵ The Buddhist chronicles profess to furnish historical details of the reigns of successive Rajas of Magadha from the death of Gótama Buddha in B.C. 543 to the end of the reign of Asoka in B.C. 288. They also give an account of three synods or convocations, which were held at different intervals during the same period, for the purpose of establishing the Buddhist canon of scriptures, and maintaining the rules of monastic discipline. As they involve much historical criticism, and are devoid of general interest, it has been deemed advisable to discuss them in the Appendix at the end of the present volume.



CHAPTER V. landmark in the annals of ancient India. He is generally identified with the Asoka of the chronicles; and for the future may be termed Asoka.²⁵ The age which preceded his reign is the twilight of Hindú history. Villages were established further and further in the deep forest, and grouped into kingdoms by conquering Rajas. Vedic Rishis and Kshatriya warriors, Brahman priests and Buddhist monks, appear respectively upon the stage, and begin to assume substantive forms. It is even possible to realize the growth of civil government. The headmen of villages holding their noisy little councils of grey-beards under the shade of widely-spreading trees; the Rajas sitting in state upon their thrones; the royal umbrella elevated above their heads, and the chamaras of hair waving to and fro; whilst chieftains and ministers are sitting around in the council hall. Here and there, mingling with every throng, may be seen the half-naked Bráhmans with their sacred thread, and the decent Srámans in the yellow robes of the monastery. But one age is jumbled up with another, for there is no chronology. The imagination wanders at will over the shifting sands of a remote past, but cannot fix a single reign or even a single century. Delhi may be coeval with Damascus; the Rajas of Ayodhyá with the priest-kings of Salem. Even the stand-point furnished by the life of Gótama Buddha is altogether

²⁵ The identification of Raja Priyadarsi of the edicts with Raja Asoka of the Buddhist chronicles was first pointed out by Mr Turnour, who rested it upon a passage in the Dipawanse. The late Professor H. H. Wilson objected to this identification (see *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, vol. xii. page 243). The identification, however, is further proved by the general resemblance between the edicts of Priyadarsi and the legends of Asoka recorded in the Buddhist chronicles. See Appendix II. to the present volume.



insecure. It has been fixed in the sixth century before the Christian era; but it might, with nearly equal probability, be thrust back another hundred or even thousand years. The so-called chronicles of the kings of Magadha, between Gótama and Alexander the Great, Vimbasara and Asoka, are little better than jumbles of myths and names.²⁷ The invasion of the Punjab by Alexander in B. C. 327,—the charge of the Macedonian cavalry against the elephants of Porus on the banks of the Jhelum,—is the first event which brings India into historical relations with the outer world. It was followed, perhaps immediately, but certainly within less than a hundred years, by the reign of Asoka; the great sovereign of Magadha, who has, as it were, left his handwriting upon rock and pillar from Cuttack to Guzerat and Cabul, and whose memory is still lingering in Sanskrit and Pali story.²⁸

The early life of Asoka is almost lost in a cloud of legend; but here and there glimpses are obtained which prove that he was a prince, who had passed through extraordinary adventures and large experiences. Whilst still a very young man he was at variance with his father, and seems to have gone into exile like another Ráma.²⁹ He is said to have

Misty age preceding Asoka.

²⁷ See Appendix II., Buddhist Chronicles.

²⁸ Compare Vishnu Purána, Book IV., chap. xxiv., with Mahawanso, chap. v., &c.

²⁹ The fact of the exile is a little uncertain. In the Buddhist chronicle he is said to have been appointed governor of Ujain, in the southern part of Rajpootana, not far from the river Nerbudda; but the appointment to so remote a province may have been equivalent to exile, and probably was a pious invention of the monkish chronicler to cover the disgrace of exile, and to represent Asoka as the son of the Raja who preceded him on the throne. The Chinese traveller, Hienou-Tsang, relates that Asoka established at Ujain a place of punishment, which was called Hell, because criminals were subjected to the same tortures in this life to which the wicked are subjected. The story proves nothing, and is



CHAPTER V. been appointed to the government of the distant province of Ujain, and subsequently to have suppressed a revolt in Taxila in the Punjab. During his wanderings he fell in love with a beautiful princess, named Devi, by whom he became the father of a son and a daughter, who were famous in later Buddhist tradition as the missionaries who first planted Buddhism in the island of Ceylon.³⁰

Asoka and
Sandrokottos
compared.

The main incidents of Asoka's early career thus present a strange similarity to those recorded of Sandrokottos by Greek writers. Sandrokottos was also an exiled prince from Patali-putra; and he ultimately drove the Greeks from Taxila. Again, Asoka usurped a throne and founded an empire; so did Sandrokottos. Asoka originally professed the Brahmanical religion, and then embraced the more practical religion of the edicts. Sandrokottos sacrificed to the gods in Brahmanical fashion; but he also held a great assembly every year, in which every discovery was discussed which was likely to prove beneficial to the earth, to mankind, or to animals generally. There is no necessity, perhaps, for laying an undue stress upon this resemblance; but still it would be a startling coincidence if the great sovereign, whose religion of duty without deity has been engraven for more than twenty centuries on the rocks and pillars of India, should prove to be the same prince who met Alexander at Taxila, who offended the

probably a monkish legend. Such stories of Buddhist saints may be edifying to pious Buddhists, but are worthless to the historian. Fah-Hian relates a somewhat similar story. See chap. xxxii., Beale's Translation.

³⁰ The brother and sister are respectively named Mahendra and Sanghamitrā. The story of their mission, surrounded with the usual halo of pious fable, may be found in the Mahawanso, chap. v.



Macedonian conqueror by his insolence and assumption, who expelled the Greeks from the Punjab during the wars of Alexander's successors, and ultimately married the daughter of Seleukos Nikator.

The accession of Asoka to the throne was signalized by a terrible tragedy, which is only briefly indicated in Buddhist tradition. The old Raja, his alleged father, was mortally sick in the royal palace at Patali-putra. The dying sovereign sent for his eldest son Susíma, who commanded in the Punjab, to succeed him on the throne. Asoka, however, appeared in the stead of his elder brother; and the Raja was so exasperated that he burst a blood-vessel and perished on the spot. Asoka is said to have had a hundred brothers, and to have slain them all save one. The statement is probably a myth, but it sufficiently indicates the perpetration of one of those wholesale massacres which are of frequent occurrence in dynastic revolutions in Asiatic kingdoms. Susíma was certainly slain, and his death was followed by an incident, which imparts a darker colouring to the tragedy. The lowest class of people in all Hindustan are the Chandálas. Their touch, their breath, their very presence, is pollution. They are scavengers and executioners, and they live like lepers in separate villages. When prince Susíma was murdered, his widow was about to become a mother; but she succeeded in effecting her escape from the palace, and found a refuge in a village of the Chandálas, where she gave birth to a son, and dwelt for seven years. The princess and her misfortunes have passed into oblivion, but the untold agony of her

Asoka's accession to the throne of Magadha.



CHAPTER V. residence amongst the Chandálas is a lasting blot upon the character of Asoka. Strangely enough, her son is said to have become a monk, and to have converted Asoka to the Buddhist faith. This startling story is not altogether impossible. The ill-fated prince, the grandson of a Raja, brought up amongst Chandálas, had no other career open to him but that of a religious mendicant; and he was doubtless glad to forget his sorrows in the seclusion of a monastery. That he should have ultimately effected the conversion of his usurping uncle is a pious legend, upon which it is impossible to pronounce an opinion.³¹

Conversion of
Asoka.

An unknown interval of some years elapses between the accession and the conversion of Asoka. During the early portion of this interval, whilst the widowed princess and her infant son were still dwelling amongst the Chandálas, Asoka was pursuing a career of conquest resembling that of Sandrokottos. The extent of his empire is indicated by his edicts. It took in the whole of Hindustan, the Punjab, and Affghanistan, from the Bay of Bengal to the Indian Ocean, and from the river Nerbudda to the mountains of Cashmere. His frontier on the north-west was formed by the western Himalayas, known as the Hindú Kúsh, which rendered his empire conterminous with that of the Greek sovereigns of Bactria. Here, in the neighbourhood of the Hindú Kúsh and the Oxus, were doubtless to be found the outer cities and fastnesses of his so-called brother and sister of the dynasty of the Seleukidæ.³²

³¹ Mahawanso, chap. v., et seq. ³² Appendix I., Edicts of Asoka, Tablet v.



Secular character of Asoka : fear of treachery, love of women and the chase.

The secular character of Asoka may be inferred from that of Sandrokkottos; for even if they are to be regarded as two distinct individuals, it is certain that they are men of the same stamp, the same culture, and the same surroundings. Sandrokkottos was in such constant fear of treachery that he never slept in the day time, and frequently changed his bed-chamber at night; and the same may be inferred of Asoka, who had ascended the throne by the murder of all his brethren, and must have been threatened by enemies of every kind. Sandrokkottos was devoted to the pleasures of the harem, and the same may be inferred of Asoka; for whilst there is an allusion in the Buddhist chronicle to the sixteen thousand women of his palace, and to his fondness for a hand-maid in his old age,³³ there is throughout the edicts a significant absence of all reference to those sensual indulgences which were the characteristics of the age.³⁴ Sandrokkottos went out occasionally to hunt with his women; and Asoka may have done the same, for in his edicts he refers to the pleasures of hunting, travelling, and marriage. Again, both sovereigns resided in the vast city of Patali-putra, with its wooden walls manned with archers, and its open moat which served both as a means of defence and a common sewer, and must have occasioned much pestilence and fever, especially under the alternate conditions of an Indian sun and Indian rains.

It is however the religious phase in the character

³³ Mahawanso, pages 27, 122.

³⁴ The lax morality of the age is proved by the reference to courtesans in the life of Gôtama Buddha and the Sanskrit drama. It is also reflected in the sculptures at Sanchi and Amravati. See the valuable photographs in Mr Ferguson's Tree and Serpent Worship.



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Religious character of Asoka.

of Asoka which is invested with the deepest interest. Indeed, the process must always be worthy of study which could transform a usurper and murderer into a philanthropist imbued with the proselytizing spirit of Buddhism. In the early years of his reign he was in the constant practice of almsgiving and sacrifice. According to the Buddhist chronicle he fed sixty thousand Bráhmans daily.³⁵ According to the edicts he daily sacrificed hundreds of thousands of animals for "virtuous purposes."³⁶ These statements are probably exaggerations, but they are precisely similar to the stories which are still told of wealthy Hindú sinners.³⁷ Almsgiving and sacrifice have been regarded as expiations for sin from the earliest age of Brahmanical teaching; and when the excitement of revolution and conquest had begun to subside, it was only natural that Asoka should endeavour to expiate his sins after the old conventional fashion.

Change of spiritual nature: revolt at sacrifices.

It was at this period of his career that the spiritual nature of Asoka underwent an entire change. The man of violence and slaughter shuddered at the sight of blood and suffering. The usurper and murderer doubted the justice which demanded that innocent animals should be slain for the expiation of his own crimes. Nor was this revulsion of feeling confined to Asoka; it was the growing public opinion of the age. The revolt of humanity against sacrifices found a still more indignant expression in the language of the Hebrew prophets than in the

³⁵ See Appendix II.

³⁶ See Appendix I., Edicts of Asoka, Tablet i.

³⁷ This is especially the case in Bengal, where goats and kids are still sacrificed by thousands to the goddess Kali or Durgá.



edicts of the Hindú Raja :—" I have desired mercy and not sacrifice ; the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings." ³⁸ The conversion of Asoka, however, was not effected in a moment. The oscillation of sentiment finds full expression in the confused language of the first edict. But when he had fairly accepted the idea he was agitated by no further hesitation. Henceforth he was bent on expiating his sins by his own merits ; by the fulfilment of duty rather than by austerities or sacrifices ; by the accumulation of good works rather than by the slaughter of goats and lambs.

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Religious character of Asoka.

The energy which had enabled Asoka to usurp a throne and conquer an empire was now expended in promulgating the religion of duty. In fact, his zeal seems in some respects to have outrun his discretion. He devoted himself heart and soul to the performance of merits, and to compelling others to perform merits. He not only abolished the slaughter of animals, but he provided for the medical treatment of those which were wounded or diseased. He set aside the established teachers, who had been tolerant of iniquity, and appointed teachers of his own with magisterial powers to enforce the fulfilment of duty. The great yearly assembly of Sandrokkottos finds no direct expression in the edicts, but it is in perfect accordance with all the measures which were established by the edicts. It is not an outgrowth of Brahmanical ritualism, nor of the Buddhist law of the wheel, but of Dharma, and Dharma alone.

Zealous promulgation of Dharma.

But the religion of Asoka, with all its practical morality, was wanting in that spiritual life which is

Absence of deity in Dharma.

³⁸ Hosea vi. 6. Compare also Micah vi. 6, 7; Isaiah i. 10—14.



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associated with a consciousness of deity. Virtue was practised, not merely because it was right, but for the sake of reward; vice was eschewed, not merely because it was wrong, but from fear of punishment. To this day there is much spontaneous goodness amongst Buddhists; but still there is much that springs from a recognition of the law of merits and demerits, rather than from a pure love for our fellow-creatures. In a word, the conception of deity is wanting; and without deity there can be no heroism and no devotion. The idea of God loving man, and that of man loving God, are essential to the religion of humanity.

Drift from
Brahmanism to
Buddhism.

The remaining history of Asoka is utterly lost, beyond the bare fact that in drifting further and further from Brahmanism, he at last avowed himself a convert to Buddhism, and embraced the three gems—Buddha, the Law, and the Assembly. The circumstances which attended this final profession of faith are unknown. Nothing has been preserved beyond a single inscription, addressed apparently to the Buddhist assembly of monks at Magadha, in which he declares that he accepts all the precepts of Buddha, and requires them to be regarded as law.³⁹ It will be seen, however, that he does not recognize the law of the wheel, or in any way express his approbation of monastic vows. Asoka, however, is celebrated in all Buddhist countries as the liberal builder of numerous viháras for the accommodation of Srámans, and especially for the construction of very many stupas, or memorial towers of Gótama Buddha.⁴⁰ According to the Buddhist chronicle he

³⁹ See the Bhadra inscription in Appendix I., Edicts of Asoka.

⁴⁰ It is not impossible that Asoka was the first king who erected memorial



died in the year B.C. 288, at the age of eighty-two. CHAPTER V.

The death of Asoka was followed by a blank of seven centuries. From B.C. 300 to A.D. 400 the valley of the Ganges was teeming with population; but they seem to have lived on from generation to generation, untouched and unchanged by the influences at work in the outer world. Dynastic revolutions may have agitated courts, but they had no effect upon the masses. The development of Buddhism may have imparted a new religious colouring to the people, but otherwise the national life was unchanged.

Death of Asoka,
B.C. 288.
Interval of
seven centuries
after Asoka.

The historical notices of India during this long interval may be briefly expressed. In the second century before the Christian era the Greek sovereigns of Bactria had been pushed further and further south by the Tochari Scythians, and had finally disappeared from the scene. Shortly before the commencement of the Christian era, Kanishka, the famous Buddhist king of the Yuchi, or Tochari Scythians, established an empire over Affghanistan, the Punjab, Rajpootana, and the upper valleys of the Jumna and Ganges, and then disappeared like the Greeks. The annals of India during this period have shrivelled into names. Ghosts of ancient Hindú sovereigns may be summoned upon the stage of history; but they appear as bloodless spectres of the past. Vikramaditya defeated the Tochari Scythians, and left his era of B.C. 56, which is still maintained throughout Hindustan. Saliváhána ap-

Isolated his-
torical notices,
B.C. 300 to A.D.
400.

towers for the reception of sacred relics. Arrian states decidedly that the Hindús allowed no monuments to be reared in honour of deceased persons (India, chap. x.). It has already been indicated that the stupas said to have been erected by Gótama Buddha were mythical. See *ante*, page 140.



CHAPTER V. appears as the champion of the Bráhmans against the Buddhists, and has left his era of A.D. 77, which is still maintained throughout the Dekkan.⁴¹ The Sáh kings reigned at Guzerat, and the Gupta kings reigned at Magadha. Future discoveries may breathe a new life into these dry bones of history; but until then the dynasties of Indian kings are of little more moment to the historian of humanity than the half-forgotten lists of old Egyptian Pharaohs.⁴² Greek culture left no impression on the life of the Hindús; it is to be traced only in the ruins of the past. Scythian culture is discernible amongst the Rajpoots; but the fact leads to no certain historical inferences. Merchants came from the east and west, and carried away traditions of Bráhman priests and Buddhist monks;⁴³ but India continued to live in a world of her own, and cared nothing for the ideas or the people that came from beyond the seas.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The ancient wars between Aryans and Scythians are probably historical. The struggle, however, has also been symbolized into an antagonism between the Bráhmans and Buddhists, which apparently belongs to a much later period.

⁴² Archæologists are the pioneers of history, and there are many who will occupy a lasting place in the history of historical research, although their labours are not as yet available to the historian. Mr Thomas's essay on the dynasty of the Sáh kings of Suráshtra is a model of laborious research and careful criticism. See *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xii., p. 1.

⁴³ About A.D. 200 Clemens of Alexandria describes both Bráhmans and Srámanas. "The Bráhmans," he says, "are worshippers of Herakles and Pan; whilst the Srámanas and Srámanás [i. e. Buddhist monks and nuns] worship certain pyramids, which they believe to contain the bones of some god." This description is sufficiently accurate. Herakles and Pan were identical with Vishnu and Siva; and the bones worshipped in pyramids are the relics preserved as honoured memorials of Gótama Buddha and his more famous disciples. Porphyry, who flourished about A.D. 300, furnishes more details. "The Bráhmans," he says, "form a family or tribe; the Srámanas are a mixture of all classes. The Srámanas shave their heads and wear tunics; and abandon their families and property to live in colleges outside the city walls. They spend their time in holy conversation, and receive daily doles of rice from the king." This account precisely agrees with that of the Chinese travellers, which is about to be brought under review.

⁴⁴ The colony of Syrian Christians in Malabar might seem to form an exception to this statement. But the Syrian Christians, like the Parsees of Bombay, have always existed as an isolated community.



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Travels of Fa-hien, A.D. 399--414.

At the commencement of the fifth century of the Christian era, whilst Alaric and his Goths were threatening imperial Rome, five Buddhist monks from China made their appearance in the Punjab. The event is in every way remarkable. The yellow-complexioned Chinese, with their broad heads, high cheek-bones, and small eyes, were probably not unfamiliar to the Hindús; and traders and seamen from the land of Han seem to have visited India from time immemorial. But the Chinese strangers in the Punjab appeared in a very different capacity. They were humble and sober-minded monks, warmly interested in Buddha and the law, and anxious for Buddhist scriptures and images, which they wished to copy and carry away to their own land.

The extension of Buddhism to China is an interesting event in religious history. The missionaries of Asoka had been the pioneers of Buddhism in an age when Judæa was still governed by its own high-priest and Sanhedrim, and was busily engaged in rebuilding the temple and restoring the law. The zealous Srámans of Magadha had made their way from the Gangetic valley to the Punjab; thence through the Khyber Pass into Cabul; and finally carried the law of Buddha over the western Himalayas into the remote kingdoms of Turkistan and Mongolia. The story of these missionary operations is lost to the world.⁴⁵ Little is known beyond the significant fact that during the unrecorded centuries which followed the death of Asoka, the pure morality and monastic teaching

Extension of Buddhism to China.

⁴⁵ See Appendix II., Buddhist Chronicles.



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of Gótama found their way into the heart of China, and laid a firm hold upon the active imaginations of Tartars and Chinese. The western world had been the theatre of the grandest events in the annals of man. Rome had completed the conquest of Italy, and grown into a colossal empire, which has left a heritage of history for all time. Christianity had been planted in Judæa and Galilee, and embraced by the Roman empire; and was already beginning to regenerate humanity. Meantime the religion of Buddha had spread from the Ganges to the Oxus and Jaxartes; and was still extending further and further beyond the northern slopes of the Himalayas towards the mountains of Altai.

Isolation of
Chinese Bud-
dhism.

But the Buddhism of China was for centuries isolated from that of India. The intermediate region was one of the most difficult on the face of the earth. The passes of the Hindú Kúsh, the precipices of the mountains of Kashghar, and the terrors of the great desert of Gobi, were barriers to all general communication; whilst the intermittent wars between the Tartars and Chinese seem to have stopped the current of missionary operations. Meantime the Buddhist traditions had grown dim, and the teaching had become confused. Many Chinese Srámans were craving for more light and more knowledge. No Buddhist scriptures were procurable; and the precepts of monastic discipline, which had been preserved by oral communication, were imperfect and few. Some of the more zealous Srámans yearned to behold the holy land of Magadha, in which the glorious Buddha had preached the incomparable law; and to obtain, if possible, copies of the sacred books in the very localities in



which they had been originally published abroad. A few made the attempt, and failed. Some perished in the great desert of Gobi. Others reached the country of the inhospitable Uigúrs, the Ogres of old romance, and were then compelled to return. At last the little band of five Srámans succeeded in surmounting every obstacle; and after a toilsome journey, which extended over five years, they found themselves in the Punjab, and prepared to make their way to the holy land of Magadha, where Gótama Buddha had taught and preached in days of old.

The leader of that little band was one of those unknown heroes in the history of humanity, whose memories have for ages died out of the world, but who are yet deserving of a permanent place on the rolls of fame. His name was Fah-Hian. He was a native of Tchang'an, in northern China; a city which was formerly the capital of the province of Shense. His fervent faith and pious humility find expression in every page of the narrative of his travels; whilst his energy of character, and indomitable zeal for the purity of the law, is proved by the fact that he was the only one of the five Srámans who succeeded in effecting the object of his mission.⁴⁶

Character of
Fah-Hian.

The march of Fah-Hian and his companions from China to India was a marvel of indomitable energy. In one respect they had an advantage over all other travellers. Buddhism flourished

March from
China to India:
the desert of
Gobi.

⁴⁶ Pilgrimage of Fah-Hian; from the French edition of the Foe koue ki of MM. Remusat, Klaproth, and Landresse. Calcutta, 1848. Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun, Buddhist pilgrims from China to India, by S. Beal. Trübner & Co., 1869. Mr Beal's unpretending volume is a treasury of valuable information.



CHAPTER V. more or less throughout the whole intermediate region; and the yellow robes of the Sráman were not only a sufficient protection from robbers, but secured from the rich and powerful an ample supply of such simple necessities as were required on the way. The great desert of Gobi was the first serious obstacle which the pilgrims encountered. It has indeed been the terror of all later travellers, from Marco Polo downwards. The dreary waste was supposed to be haunted by demons. The sirocco winds blew so fiercely over the sands that not a beast or a bird could be seen. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing but desert, strewn here and there with the blanched bones of men who had perished by the way. But after seventeen days of toil and anxiety they passed in safety through the perilous solitudes, and once more found themselves amongst the habitations of man.⁴⁷

The Tartars.

On leaving the desert the travellers pushed on through a rugged and barren region towards the remote kingdom of Khotan. The people on the way were all Tartars, more or less under the influence of Chinese culture. The shape of their dress was like that of the Chinese, but they wore felts and woollens instead of blue cottons. They spoke different dialects of the Tartar language. They were all inclined to Buddhism after the Indian schools; and the Srámans of the country studied the Buddhist scriptures in the Indian language;⁴⁸ but they belonged only to the elementary form of Buddhism known as the little Vehicle. The Uigúr people offered no

⁴⁷ Fah-Hian, chap. i.

⁴⁸ This Indian language was either Pali or Sanskrit. Probably it referred to both.



obstruction to the pilgrims. Fah-Hian had obtained a pass which procured from the king of the Uigúrs a hospitable reception for the whole party. But the country beyond the Uigúrs was long, difficult, and desolate. The unfortunate pilgrims endured the utmost misery in crossing rivers and scaling mountains. At last they succeeded in reaching the kingdom of Khotan; and there for a while their toils were over. The laity of Khotan were extremely wealthy; and the kingdom was a stronghold of Buddhist culture according to the great Vehicle.⁴⁹

The distinction between the little and great Vehicles is one of considerable significance in dealing with religious development. The little Vehicle was an expression of practical Buddhism; and dealt more with moral rules, and minor and precise precepts of discipline. The great Vehicle was an expression of intellectual Buddhism; and dealt more with metaphysical speculation, spiritual abstraction, and psychological analysis. The monks of the little Vehicle laid the most stress upon abstinence and restraint; those of the great Vehicle upon contemplation and study. The practices of the little Vehicle were more adapted to humanity in its childhood; those of the great Vehicle to the higher forms of mental culture. It would thus seem that the monks of the little Vehicle were striving after heaven; whilst the monks of the great Vehicle were striving after Nirvána.⁵⁰

The little and great Vehicles.

⁴⁹ Fah-Hian, chap. ii.

⁵⁰ The Sanskrit names for the little and great Vehicles were Hinayána and Maháyána. Mr Beal, in the introduction to his translation of Fah-Hian, furnishes some interesting observations on the two Vehicles. See *Introd. part iv. et seq.* Compare also M. Saint Hilaire, "Le Bouddha et sa Religion," Part II., chap. iii.



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Religious details supplied by Fah-Hian.

Fah-Hian was a true Sráman. He had no eyes for the social life of the people, excepting so far as it was associated with their religious aspects. He noticed with pious joy that the inhabitants of Khotan took especial pleasure in the performance of their religious duties. He observed that they built their houses in clusters; but adds that stupas, or towers, were constructed before their doors; and that additional apartments in each house were set apart for the entertainment of foreign Srámans. The Sanghárámas, or colleges of Buddhist monks, particularly attracted his admiration. These institutions indicate the vast development which Buddhism had gone through since the days of Sákya Muni. The house, or Vihára, had grown into a college, or Sangháráma. The monks were no longer distributed into little communities, but formed into large universities. Each Sangháráma contained numerous apartments for resident Srámans, together with surrounding grounds, and a chapel or hall for the Sanghá, or assembly.⁵¹

Kingdom of Khotan.

Fah-Hian and his companions were received with peculiar consideration by the king of Khotan, possibly because they were Srámans from China. They were lodged in a large Sangháráma, which was named Gómati, and enjoyed the special favour of the sovereign. This royal college contained three thousand monks, all of whom belonged to the great Vehicle. Fah-Hian now appears to have witnessed the superior spiritual life of the followers of the great Vehicle for the first time. Especially he

⁵¹ The three gems,—Buddha, the Law and the Assembly,—known as Buddha, Dharma, and Sanghá,—had now a substantive existence.



noticed the pious order and silence that was maintained during the daily meal. At the sound of the gong, the whole of the three thousand Srámans assembled in the dining-hall, and took their seats one after the other with the utmost decorum and propriety. Not a sound was to be heard. No noise was made with the bowls, and there was no chattering amongst the monks. If a Sráman required food, he merely made a sign with his fingers, and was then supplied.⁵²

Fah-Hian halted more than three months at Khotan, in order to witness the processions of images. Here it may be remarked that Fah-Hian was not only anxious to secure copies of the Buddhist scriptures, but to ascertain the more orthodox forms of religious practice. He duly notices the worship of relics, and the construction of stupas, monasteries, and colleges; and it will be seen hereafter that he collected images as well as sacred writings. The processions at Khotan would thus present peculiar attractions to the Chinese pilgrim; and they serve to recall to modern readers the extraordinary pictures of ancient life which still lingers on in modern Hinduism. There were fourteen large Sanghárámas in the capital, besides smaller ones; and each of the fourteen had its own procession, and a separate day for it. The first procession was that of the royal Gómati college, and will serve as a type of all. The streets were swept and watered, and decorated with garlands and banners. A pavilion was set up over the chief gate of the city for the reception of the king and all his ladies. Meantime, about three

Processions of
images of Bud-
dha.

⁵² Fah-Hian, chap. iii.



CHAPTER V. quarters of a mile from the city, the priests of the Gómati college had constructed a large four-wheeled car, about thirty-five feet in height, which resembled a royal palace. This car was adorned with gold, silver, and precious stones; and decorated with silken streamers, flags, and curtains. A golden image of Gótama Buddha was placed upright in the centre, with two Bódhisatwas in attendance, whilst images of all the gods were placed around.⁵³ All these images were made of gold and silver; whilst glittering gems were hung around them. The car was then conducted by a procession of Srámans towards the city. When it was within a hundred paces of the chief gate, the king descended from the pavilion, and laid aside his royal diadem, and arrayed himself in new garments. He then took flowers and incense in his hands, and went forth with bare feet to meet the procession of Srámans, followed by all his suite. On reaching the car he paid his adoration to Buddha by bowing his head to the ground; and then scattered flowers and burnt incense before the car. When the car reached the city the ladies in the pavilion threw down flowers in endless variety. In this manner each procession

⁵³ The Bódhisatwa is a being who has arrived at supreme wisdom (Bódhi), and yet consents to remain as a creature (satwa) for the good of men. The Bódhisatwas were originally men of eminent piety; but under the later system, they were imaginary beings idealized under certain forms, and possessed of certain distinct attributes.—Beal, *Travels of Fah-Hian*, chap. iv., *note*.

The gods were apparently placed in the car to enable them to pay homage to Buddha. This is a favourite idea of the Buddhists, but must have originally given considerable offence to the Bráhmans. These deities do not include the materialistic gods and goddesses, of whom Vishnu and Siva were the types; but the old Vedic group of deified spirits of the elements, of whom Indra was the divine sovereign. The association of these Vedic deities with Gótama Buddha is frequent in Burma; but there are no traces of Vishnu or Siva.



was brought to a close; the whole festival lasting CHAPTER V.
fourteen days.⁵⁴

From Khotan, Fah-Hian and his companions proceeded to Kartchou, where the king was performing another great ceremony in connection with Buddhism. This was the quinquennial expiation ordered by the third edict of Raja Priyadarsi.⁵⁵ The king of Kartchou had invited the attendance of the Srámans of every land. The great council-hall of the monks was decorated with silken flags and canopies. In the centre was erected a draped throne, adorned with gold and silver lotos flowers; and behind the throne were arranged the seats for the Srámans.⁵⁶ When all were assembled the king and his ministers made their offerings of woollens and other things necessary for the monks. The king and all his nobles and ministers then presented their horses and trappings to the assembly; but redeemed them afterwards by paying up the value.⁵⁷

Quinquennial
expiation at
Kartchou.

After leaving Kartchou the Chinese pilgrims commenced the most dangerous part of the whole journey. Their route lay over the mountains of Bolor, which include the Pamir steppe, or "roof of the world;" and the western Himalayas, known as the Hindú Kúsh. The perils which the poor Srámans encountered in crossing these ranges can scarcely be realized. The mountains were supposed to shelter enormous dragons, who would spit their poison on all who chanced to offend them. On the

Pamir steppe
and Hindú
Kúsh.

⁵⁴ Fah-Hian, chap. iii.

⁵⁵ See Appendix I., Edicts of Asoka, Tablet iii.

⁵⁶ See the legendary account of the first Synod, Appendix II., Buddhist chronicles.

⁵⁷ Fah-Hian, chaps. iv., v.



HAPTER V. Bolor mountains travellers often perished from the wind, rain, and snow, and the drift of sand and gravel. The steep crags and precipices of the Hindú Kúsh were equally terrible. The mountains were often huge walls of stone, thousands of feet in height. To look over the edge would turn the strongest brain, whilst at the slightest slip the unwary pilgrim would be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. At the foot of the mountains was the river Indus. It was approached by seven hundred steps which had been cut in the rock in ancient times; and it could only be crossed by one of those swinging bridges of rope, which are still in use in that quarter, and are dangerous in the extreme to the inexperienced traveller.⁵⁸

Udyána and Swat country: worship of relics.

It is unnecessary to follow Fah-Hian through Udyána and the Swat country into the Punjab proper. The land is strewn with the ruins of Buddhism, but Buddhism itself has passed away with the advance of Islam. The localities were famous for exaggerated legends, which may still prove of interest to the pious Buddhist, but are worthless for all historical purposes.⁵⁹ Relics of

⁵⁸ Fah-Hian, chaps. vi., vii.

⁵⁹ Buddhist legends may possibly yield more interesting results to special students in Buddhist lore, and may be studied in the learned works of Burnouf, Julien, and Saint Hilaire. But in general they are mere exaggerations of moral and religious teaching. The legends of Gótama Buddha giving away his flesh, whether to feed a starving tiger, or to satisfy a hawk which will otherwise devour a dove, are strained instances of benevolence which are revolting to European tastes; whilst other prodigies and miracles of a supernatural character, already indicated in dealing with the life of Gótama Buddha, may be passed over in silence. A few seem to be invested with a semi-historical value, which fades away on being analyzed. The story of Kunála, the son of Asoka, belongs to this category. It occupies ten quarto pages in Burnouf's "Buddhisme Indien," but may be summed up in a few sentences. One of Asoka's queens fell in love with the beautiful eyes of Kunála, but he refused to listen to her advances. He was subsequently sent to Takshasila, the Taxila of the Greeks, to govern the