

Ahimsa (Non-Cruelty.)

BY

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"Then, craving leave, he spake of life, which all can take but none can give, Life, which all creatures love and strive to keep, Wonderful, dear, and pleasant unto each, Even to the meanest."



WHEN Prince Siddhartha the Redeemer of the world, having abandoned the luxuries of his father's palace, was abiding in the joy and ease of emancipation, he one day chanced to meet some herdsmen, whose principal duty was to take charge of sheep and goats, feed them by day, and drive them home at eve. But the Prince observing that the flock was being led home at noon, a rather unusual hour, inquired as to the cause of it, and learned that a hundred of these dumb creatures were to be slaughtered that night, by King Bimbisara, as a sacrifice in worship of the gods. Carrying a lamb that was hurt and lame, Our Lord proceeded towards the palace, along with the herdsmen. The populace, and the king, were alike filled with consternation on seeing a holy hermit, who, they thought, was bearing the lamb to crown the sacrifice. But not so was the intention of our gentle Lord. In the palace the soft notes of his voice fell like musical tunes on the ears of the king, and the Brahmins, who had come to aid him in the slaughter. He spoke to them of the heinous crime, they had so far been committing, in all good faith. And he pleaded, in words that would have stirred the hardest and sternest of hearts, on behalf of the dumb beings, who are but subservient to the (fancies) and inclinations of powerful man. This discourse, coming as it did, as a surprise to all, was by no means a mere cry in the wilderness of humanity. The very next day the king issued a proclamation, edicting that no animal should be slaughtered in his realms, nay, not even for human consumption.

This was by no means the only occasion on which our Lord advocated the noble doctrine of Ahimsa. Numerous discourses dealing with the evils resulting from killing, and portraying its Karmic results, flowed from His gentle lips. In fact, so that erring man may not lightly pass it over He has laid it down as the first of His ten noble precepts. "All beings tremble at death, all beings fear punishment, remember that you are like unto them, and do not kill nor cause slaughter." What noble and wholesome sentiments embody these terse and crisp statements. If nothing can move a man; if no reasonable arguments can persuade him to be an observer of Ahimsa; let the thought that all living beings treasure their own lives dearest, move him to pity. Aye, for pity's sake, if not for anything else! So taught Lord Buddha, the brilliant radiance shed by Whose teaching is a consummate guidance, to enable men to cross the ocean of transmigrating existence, and reach the Other Shore (Nirvana).

One of the chief arguments we, as Buddhists, bring forward in the advocacy of Ahimsa is that, since Karma is the Law governing all, and since it is no respecter of persons, each man or woman is liable to be reborn in some lower form of being, as beast or bird, according as each deserves. Hence follows the self-evident and palpable conclusion, that in killing an animal, of however low form, it may be, that we are committing as great a sin as the murder of a fellowman of ours. It is a misunderstanding of this fact that makes the world more miserable than it would otherwise be. On the occasion narrated above, when our Lord condemned and censured the practice of sacrifice, in the glowing words of Sir Arnold, he taught

"How fair This earth were if all living beings be linked in friendliness and common use of foods, bloodless and pure."

The Karmic results, that a person has to undergo, by not obeying this precept and doctrine, are very serious though condign endless suffering in hell, rebirth in a lower form of being, (if born as a man) the deformation or lack of some organs of the body are a few, of the many results that a man brings on himself by killing, or even causing hurt. Hence, we find that, to walk in the Noble Eight fold Path of Virtue, a disciple of Buddha has to eradicate from his mind the passion and thirst for bloodshed and carnage, so often found in this world. It is perhaps not widely known, that the resolution or determination to kill, amounts to almost as much as slaughter itself, and does not escape the clutching hands of Karma. The measures, that one adopts, in depriving a being of life, also, in a great degree, determine the consequences that result therefrom. For example, the employing implements of torture is heavily punishable. This is one of the cruelest, if not the most, cruel wickedness that the officious and meddling hand of man has contrived or invented. The rack, the inquisition, the guillotine, are notorious examples that shock and horrify the student of history. It may not be out of place to mention the undeniable fact that this tendency towards cruelty is attributable to non-adherence to Buddhism, or any other religion with the same noble and elevated principles. The sublime Teachings of the god-like Nazarene leave such to be desired. "Christian Civilisation might profit from Buddhism" said Rev. W. H. H. Murray, at Boston, U. S. A., about 40 years ago. "And New England

might go to school in China and India. While old England and New England have used the rack, the cell, the dungeon, the inquisition and thousands of implements of torture, there have been twentyfour hundred years of Buddhism with not a drop of blood in its onward march; not a groan along its pathway. It has never persecuted; never deceived the people; never practised pious fraud; never appealed to prejudice; never used the sword.

Writing of bloodshed one notices that Europe has seen more slaughter, in its few centuries of so-called civilisation, than, the East in more than double that time. The recent gigantic and colossal struggle in Europe, the likeness of which had never been heard or dreamed of before, nipped in the bud the youthful careers of an innumerable host of men. Its origin, we may without fear of contradiction say, was due to the hatred, international inter-racial that emanated from commercial rivalry, we read in the five hundred and fifty Jataka tales of how our Lord even in previous births showed an aversion for the very sight of blood, and all manner of causing suffering or hurt. As the commander of a great army, he, we are told, obstinately declined to fight against a comparatively weaker enemy who threatened the gates of the royal city. Should not all Buddhists hold fast to the same course of conduct that adopted by the Bodhisatta? Ought we not to strive and check an evil, monstrous in its effects and consequences, which has so far been wrongly termed a necessity?

as Easterners, we are confronted with a veritable problem. The question arises whether or not those, who eat meat, are observers of Ahimsa. The Teaching of the Buddha, however, is this. He does not forbid His disciples the eating of meat and fish, provided that they comply with three important conditions. The fish or meat must be awfully pure in three ways: unseen (adittham,) unheard (asutam,) and unsuspected (aparisaukhattam) to put it more explicitly, the monk, or disciple, must neither have seen that the being in question was slaughtered for his very sake, nor must he have heard so, nor must he entertain any suspicion whatsoever that it is so. Such meat is termed "meat already existing," as opposed to "meat purposely obtained." The consumption of the latter variety is contrary to the Buddha's precepts. Hence we arrive at the conclusion, as the Buddha taught in the Amagandha Sutta, that it is no sin to eat meat subject to the above conditions, nor does such an action involve any sort of uncleanness. But for us, who are weak, frail and human, would it not be more prudent to altogether abstain from meat-eating? Is not discretion the better part of valour?

We are supposed to be living in an age when civilisation is at the zenith of its lustre; when knowledge is not a lonely eremite, but a citizen, and a leader of citizens. Yet how often do we forget that we are far behind those ancient men of India, who prohibited the slaughter of any animal whatsoever! Has there been any attempt, may, thought, on the part of our civilised and up-to-date governments to stamp out from



RUINS OF AN ANCIENT PIRIVENA ENTRANCE.

The method of invoking the blessings of the gods, by sacrificing dumb animals, prohibited by Lord Buddha in the story above epitomised, was another cruel form of slaughter among the ancients. It was in vogue in almost every country, and every world empire of those dark and dismal ages. In Egypt, as one may read in the Old Testament of the Bible, slaughter for sacrifice was very common. The sins of all used to be laid on the lamb or goat, and with the assistance of priests, the innocent, harmless animal was slaughtered! Rome and Greece, which are now mere names, also, cherished this common delusion. How ridiculous of such people to attempt a reconciliation, between themselves and the gods, termed good, by means of the sight of gore, which deities hate!

With regard to Ahimsa and meat-eating, a question that has been mooted by learned Westerners, as well

their midst this heinous crime of slaughter, the ill consequences of which were expounded, so far back as 2500 years ago by a voice "whose sound was like the sea?" Alas! how often we chance to meet men and youths, of otherwise sound principles and noble thoughts, indulging in the taking away of life from harmless bird or beast! To those, whose chief aim in life is not to hoard up worldly gains, but to store up treasures for the Hereafter, let the Voice of that noble and self-sacrificing Prince of India, the Emancipator of the world, speak, in the oft-quoted but heedlessly neglected warning:

"Kill not, for pity's sake, and lest ye slay
The meanest thing upon its
upward way."

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