

## WHY DO WE FIGHT ?

SINCE the recent World War we all talk so much of peace, and yet most nations seem to be preparing for another war; for see how much money they are spending apparently with this in view! Recently the burden is proving too much even for a wealthy nation, and we want to call a halt to these mad races for fight. But, let us ask, why do we have to fight?

The answer is simple enough from our point of view: the evil, in its various forms, is rooted in the erroneous conception of ego-soul, or in the fixed idea of an individual soul-substance (*ātma*). When this is removed, the positive notion of universal brotherhood and of the oneness of all things in the Dharmakāya or the Law-Body will assert itself freely and gloriously.

Relativity is the law of existence, nothing can subsist without conforming to this norm. The mountain towers high because the waves roll in the ocean. Vinegar is sour because sugar is sweet. Take away the blackness of coal and the whiteness of snow disappears. This is no poetic imagination, but an actual fact we experience everyday which no amount of analysis or sophistry or anything can do away with. All kinds of causal agencies and most complicated systems of conditions govern the world—which is known by the Buddhists as the principle of *Paccaya* (*Pratyaya* in Sanskrit), and when this balance is ignored or disturbed, sufferings are sure to result, for justice ceases to be operative.

Existence is thus like a network of a most intricate nature, and individuals are like the joints making up meshes of the net. What we call an ego, therefore, has no real independent existence; when we think of one we have to

think of others, we are all interrelated. To assert the ego beyond the legitimate limits of the interrelationship of things, means moral violence. The noblest act will naturally be to promote the unity and harmony of the whole, which may sometimes involve the sacrifice of the self in life or in possessions.

Why do we fight? Because each ego wants to predominate over others, not always in accordance with the principle of *Paccāya* or *Anātamanā*. The pine-needles want to be green, just green by themselves, plucking out all the flowers so gorgeously bedecking the spring field. But this never will do, for it finally means the destruction of the pine itself. When the fighter alone is left with all his foes vanquished, will that suit him perfectly? Yes, just for a moment, a feeling of pride and self-importance, too puerile, or rather too barbarous, to be cherished by any civilised people. Imagine a man standing self-content amidst the gory carnage of his enemy so called. And remember that such a fighting takes place in various manners but always with the same result.

National pride in its narrow and arrogant form, and racial prejudice against people not of the same colour, and imperialistic militarism never satiated but always ready for self-aggrandisement,—these are the vices that nowadays set up one nation against another. Perhaps the last mentioned of these three evils may not assert itself any more in its brutal form, for it now takes the shape of commercial greed or economical expansion. Names are often fine and look innocent and sometimes quite rational; but at the bottom the ghost of ego-soul lurks. When the bubble is pricked, the ghost is exposed all in its disgusting features.

The ego-centered thoughts always breed inharmony and end in destruction all around. The Buddha laid his hand at the root of all evils when he declared the *ātman* to be an

empty shell if deprived of its interrelationship with all other things.

Many beautiful legends are told of the Buddha as to his spirituality, self-sacrifice, infinite compassion, and wonderful wisdom while he was still in his Bodhisattvahood and also after his attainment of Buddhahood. In the following extracts from various sources, we wish to show where lies the spirit of Buddhism.

The Buddha must have ever been troubled with the political state of affairs then existing among the different states in India, especially as his own kingdom, however small it might have been, was always threatened by the domineering attitude of Kosala. Hence Māra's temptation, which, however, was powerless to thwart the Buddha from his determination we read in the *Samyutta Nikāya*\* :

“The Exalted One was once staying among the Kosalese in the Himālaya regions, dwelling in a leaf-hut. Now as the Exalted One was meditating in privacy, this thought arose in his heart: ‘Is it possible to exercise governance without smiting nor letting others slay, without conquering nor causing others to conquer, without sorrowing nor making others sorrow, righteously?’

“Then Māra discerning what was in the mind of the Exalted One, drew near to him and said: ‘Let the Exalted One, Lord, exercise governance, let the Blessed One rule without smiting . . . . . righteously.’

“‘Now what, O evil one, hast thou in view, that thou speakest thus to me: Let the Exalted One exercise governance! Let the Blessed One rule righteously?’

“‘Lord, the four stages to potency have by the Exalted One been developed,—well applied. Thus if the Exalted One were to wish the Himālaya to be gold, he might determine

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\* III, 2, 10. From Mrs. Rhys Davids' *Kindred Sayings*, I, pp. 145-146.

it to be so, and the mountain would become a mass of gold.'

"The Exalted One said:

' And were the mountain all of shimmering gold,  
 Not e'en twice reckoned would it be enough  
 For one man's wants. This let us learn  
 To know, and shape our lives accordingly.  
 He that hath suffering seen, and whence its source,  
 How should that man to sense-desires incline?  
 If he but understand rebirth's substrate  
 And know: here hangs the world bound fast always,  
 He fain must work the bonds to eliminate.'

"Then Māra vanished there."

The Jātaka-Tales are full of wonderful and miraculous deeds of the Buddha while he was still a Bodhisattva. The one here taken from J. S. Speyer's translation of the *Jātakamālā* or *Garlands of Birth Stories*, originally compiled by Ārya Śūra (or Aśvaghosha) and belonging to Mahāyāna literature, refers to the Buddha's self-sacrifice to the hungry tigress. The frontispiece\* to the present number of *The Eastern Buddhist* illustrates the story. This is probably an impossible case, one might think, but in one of the Chinese biographical histories of Buddhism, known as *Lives of Saintly Buddhist Monks* (高僧傳) by Hui Chiao (慧皎) of the Liang dynasty (502-557 A. D.), we read (Fas. XII) such cases actually taking place in those remote days when people were not yet sophisticated as we are today. T'an Ch'eng (曇稱)

\* In this picture which is an enlarged reproduction from one of the paintings decorating an imperial shrine known as the "Pearl-Insect Shrine" (*Tanamushi-no-dzushi*), more than one thousand years old, the Bodhisattva appears three times in three aspects: first, he divests himself; the second depicts him as falling from the precipice, and the third shows the hungry tigress with her children devouring him.

sacrificed himself to a tiger that devastated his village so that it would never again give trouble to the inhabitants. Fa Chin (法進) gave himself up to a group of starving people waiting for relief which was delayed. They refused the offer, but he cut himself piece by piece and mixing his own flesh with salt gave it to the people until he could not operate any more on himself; he then told them to continue the operation, saying this would probably sustain them for a few days and at the same time hasten the expected relief work of the king. In a way these deeds are barbarous and reckless, but what interests and impresses us is not the barbarity of the deeds, but the spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. We, moderners, being more enlightened (so let us hope) may know some better and far more humane way of offering ourselves to the cause of humanity. Let us bow to the spirit underlying all these self-annihilating deeds.

Let us now quote *The Jātakamālā*: Below in a cavern of the mountain, the Bodhisattva now beheld a young tigress that could scarcely move from the place, her strength being exhausted by the labour of whelping. Her sunken eyes and her emaciated belly betokened her hunger, and she was regarding her own offspring as food, who thirsting for the milk of her udders, had come near her, trusting their mother and fearless; but she brawled at them, as if they were strange to her, with prolonged harsh roarings.

On seeing her, the Bodhisattva, though composed in mind, was shaken by compassion by the suffering of his fellow-creature, as the lord of the mountains (Mera) is by an earthquake. It is a wonder, how the compassionate, be their constancy ever so evident in the greatest sufferings of their own, are touched by the grief, however small, of another! And his powerful pity made him utter, agitation made him repeat to his pupil the following words manifesting his excellent nature:

“My dear, my dear,” he exclaimed, “Behold the worthlessness of Samsāra! This animal seeks to feed on her very own young ones. Hunger causes her to transgress love’s law. Alas! Fie upon the ferocity of self-love, that makes a mother wish to make her meal with the bodies of her own offspring! Who ought to foster the foe, whose name is self-love, by whom one may be compelled to actions like this? Go, then, quickly and look about for some means of appeasing her hunger, that she may not injure her young ones and herself. I too shall endeavour to avert her from that rash act.”

The disciple promised to do so, and went off in search of food. Yet the Bodhisattva had but used a pretext to turn him off. He considered thus:

“Why should I search after meat from the body of another, whilst the whole of my own body is available? Not only is the getting of the meat in itself a matter of chance, but I should also lose the opportunity of doing my duty. Further, this body being brute, frail, pitiless, ungrateful, always impure, and a source of suffering, he is not wise who should not rejoice at its being spent for the benefit of another. There are but two things that make one disregard the grief of another: attachment to one’s own pleasure and the absence of the power of helping. But I cannot have pleasure, whilst another grieves, and I have the power to help; why should I be indifferent? And if, while being able to succour, I were to show indifference even to an evil-doer immersed in grief, my mind, I suppose, would feel the remorse for an evil deed, burning like shrubs caught by a great fire.

“Therefore, I will kill my miserable body by casting it down into the precipice, and with my corpse I shall preserve the tigress from killing her young ones and the young ones from dying by the teeth of their mother. Even more, by so doing I set an example to those who long for the good of

the world; I encourage the feeble; I rejoice those who understand the meaning of charity; I stimulate the virtuous; I cause disappointment to the great hosts of Māra, but gladness to those who love the Buddha-virtues; I confound the people who are absorbed in selfishness and subdued by egotism and lusts; I give a token of faith to the adherents of the most excellent of vehicles, but I fill with astonishment those who sneer at deeds of charity; I clear the high-way to Heaven in a manner pleasing to the charitable among men; and finally that wish I yearned for, 'When may I have the opportunity of benefiting others with the offering of my own limbs?'—I shall accomplish it now, and so acquire ere long Complete Wisdom.

"Verily, as surely as this determination does not proceed from ambition, nor from thirst of glory, nor is a means of gaining Heaven or royal dignity, as surely as I do not care even for supreme and everlasting bliss for myself, but for securing the benefit of others: as surely may I gain by it the power of taking away and imparting for ever at the same time the world's sorrow and the world's happiness, just as the sun takes away darkness and imparts light!

"Whether I shall be remembered, when virtue is seen to be practised, or made conspicuous, when the tale of my exploit is told; in every way may I constantly benefit the world and promote its happiness!"

After so making up his mind, delighted at the thought that he was to destroy even his life for securing the benefit of others, to the amazement even of the calm minds of the deities he gave up his body.

How is hate to be requited? With hate, or with love? This was once the mooted question. Confucius's mind was juridical, so he taught to deal with justice in everything; Laotze was more religiously inclined, and his doctrine was to

requite hatred with love. Christ was also an advocate of charity, he naturally went with Laotze. The Buddha preached in the following manner :

When some of his disciples went to the Himālaya Mountains and sat there in religious contemplation under the shade of the trees found there, the spirits that dwelt in the woods, unable to live there any longer, disturbed the monks in their meditations. When the monks complained to the Buddha, he counselled them to restrain their passion and to be kind to the spirits of the woods, notwithstanding the disturbance created by them. He taught his disciples mainly as follows :\*

“If anything is fit to be done by one who has arrived at the tranquil state, and is skilled in seeking his own good, —let him be able, upright, very upright, of soft speech, gentle, free from conceit.

“Contented and easily supported by others, not overwhelmed by the affairs of the world, not burdened with many things, let him have his senses calmed, be possessed of matured wisdom, not proud, or attached specially to any particular family.

“Certainly do nothing low, for doing which others, who are wise, might reprove you. May all living beings be happy and safe! Let them be happy-minded!

“Whatever living beings there be, all these without exception, be they movable or immovable, long or great, middle-sized or short, minute or vast; visible or invisible, living far or near, already born or are about to be born, let them all be happy-minded!

“Let not one deceive another in any place whatsoever, let him not despise, let him neither through anger or hatred wish harm to another.

“As at the risk of her own life a mother watches over

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\* From *The Metta Sutta*, in the “Sutta Nipāta,” translated by M. Coomāra Swamy, p. 38 *et seq.*



her only child, so also let him exert illimitable goodwill towards all beings.

“Let one exercise goodwill, illimitable, unobstructed, freed from enmity, revengefulness, towards the entire world, above, below, around.

“Standing, moving, sitting, lying, so long as sleep does not overtake you, preserve this thought in your memory, that living thus is excellent living.

“Whoever, not having strayed into the way of heresy, observing virtuous conduct, perfect in mental sight, has subdued the longing for the pleasures of the senses, will not return to a mother’s womb.”

It will be interesting to note in this connection the Buddha’s attitude towards Devadatta and his party of evil-doers. According to tradition, the Buddha regarded them with the same kindness that he would towards any other being, in fact he awaited their arrival with all affection as the mother looks out for the coming of her only child (*ekaputta-bhumi*).

How the Buddha put an end to the quarrel of two cities over irrigation water, is told by Spence Hardy in his *Manual of Buddhism*, (pp. 307–308):

Between the cities of Kapila and Koli there was a river called the Rohini. By the erection of an embankment, the inhabitants of both cities were enabled to irrigate the lands upon which they cultivated their rice; but it happened that in consequence of a drought the water became insufficient for the fields of both the parties. The people of Kapila put in a claim of exclusive right to the little water that flowed in the river; but the people of Koli asserted the similar claim, and feud commenced, which led to serious dissensions. At one time about a hundred persons were assembled on each side, and abuse was plentifully poured out.

The people of Koli said that the people of Kimbulwat

were like pigs and dogs, as they intermarried with their sisters; and they in return said that the people of Koli were descended from parents who were leprous, and who lived like bats in a hollow tree. This affair was related, with much exaggeration to their respective kings.

The Śākya said that whatever might be the manner of their origin, they would prove that their swords were sharp; and the princes of Koli were equally ready to show the might of those who had come from the hollow tree. Both sides prepared for battle, and assembled their forces on the bank of the river. The princesses of the opposite parties, when they heard of these proceedings, went to the spot to entreat their relatives to desist from their intentions, but no regard was paid to their request.

At this time the Buddha was in Sewet, and when looking around the world, as he was accustomed to do in the morning watch, he saw that a battle was about to take place, and then looked further to see if it were possible to prevent it by his personal interference; when he perceived, that if he were to go to the place, and deliver a discourse, five hundred princes would be induced to become monks. He therefore went, and remaining suspended in the air, caused a darkness to appear, so thick that the combatants were unable to see each other.

The Śākya, on seeing him, said that it would be wrong to fight in the presence of the jewel of their races and threw down their weapons; and the princes of Kōli followed their example. Then the Buddha descended from the air, and sat on a throne on the bank of the river, where he received the homage of all the princes. The teacher of the three worlds inquired why they had come together; was it to celebrate a river festival?

They replied that it was not for pastime, but for battle; and when he asked what was the reason of their quarrel, the

kings said that they did not exactly know ; they would inquire of the commander-in-chief ; but he, in turn, said that he must make inquiry of the sub-king ; and thus the inquiry went on, until it came to the husbandman, who related the whole affair.

The Buddha, after hearing their relation, said, "What is the value of the water?" "It is little," said the princes. "What of earth?" "It is inconsiderable." "What of kings?" "It is unspeakable." "Then would you," said the Buddha, "destroy that which is of incomparable value for that which is worthless?" After this he repeated three Jātakas and a Sutra, by which he appeased the wrath of the combatants.

There is nothing more to add to these quotations already grown too long, except that inasmuch as we are ignorant of the nature of what we call the self, war will continue how many conferences we may have, among individuals as well as nations. Even when we have no arms to fight with as the result of complete disarmament, we shall go on fighting, for have we not our hands and feet and teeth? Reconstruct our hearts and our minds according to the ancient wisdom taught by the Buddha, and all our dreadnaughts and biplanes or monoplanes will be doing splendid service for promoting the real welfare of humanity and advancing the grades of civilisation, instead of doing the work of Satan. Take away your armaments which you have put over your own hearts, open them unreservedly to the light of truth, and have even the darkest corners of them penetrated by the light. When this light illumines the world, no conferences will be needed.

"The man who guards not, nor is guarded, sire,  
Lives happy, freed from slavery to lusts."

(*Jātaka*, No. 10)

But we cannot help putting some hopes in Conferences or Leagues of Nations, seeing that they are fundamentally based upon our spiritual insight which tells us the uselessness and irrationality of all kinds of pride and prejudice and arrogance. Let us not forget to emphasise this basic truth whichever way the Washington Conference may turn, a success or failure.

Jotidāsa, one of the venerable disciples of the Enlightened One, sings (*Psalms of the Early Buddhist Brethren*, translated by Mrs Rhys Davids, p. 120):

“They who in divers ways by deeds of force  
And violence, rude and rough-mannered folk,  
Do work their fellow-creatures injury.  
Thereby they too themselves are overthrown,  
For never is the effect of action lost.  
The deed a man doth, be it good or ill,  
To all his doing is he verily the heir.”

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