

**THE CHURCH OF THIBET,
AND THE HISTORICAL
ANALOGIES OF BUDDHISM
AND CHRISTIANITY**

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The Church of Thibet, and the Historical Analogies of Buddhism and Christianity by W. Wordsworth

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W. WORDSWORTH

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AND THE

HISTORICAL ANALOGIES OF BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

"A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE STUDENTS'
LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY,"

"IN THE FRAMJI COWASJI INSTITUTION, BOMBAY,"

BY

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Fratelli, a un tempo stesso, Amore e Morte
Ingenero la sorte.
Cose quaggiu si belle
Altre il mondo non ha, non han le stelle.
Nasce dall' uno il bene,
Nasce il piacer maggiore
Che per lo mar dell' essere si trova;
L'altra ogni gran dolore
Ogni gran male annulla,

Poesie di Leopardi,



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THE materials for this lecture were derived, as stated in the text, from sources which are accessible to everybody. My chief obligations are due to Burnouf, Lassen, and Keoppen, more particularly the last, without whose aid my lecture could certainly never have been written. I can well believe that I have fallen into some errors in my exposition of Buddhist theology, as matters of this kind are open to much dispute, and probably there have been recent additions to our knowledge of this subject with which I am unacquainted. For the purpose, however, which I had in view, minute accuracy was unessential. In the comparative study of religious phenomena the most obvious and general facts are the most important.

I cannot guess whether any of my Brahmanic friends and hearers were displeased with the freedom of my references to the Brahmanic gods, and the system of caste. Probably they have become so familiar with depreciatory criticism, from missionary and liberal quarters alike, of their institutions and creed, that now they rather like it, or at least never think of resenting it. Some of my Christian hearers were, I fear, not quite so tolerant of the frequent references to the close analogies between Buddhist and Christian supernaturalism. Many persons who hold on the dogmas of their inherited belief is of the lightest kind, still object strongly to hear them questioned in India, or classed with native beliefs. Their pride of race is wounded by whatever seems to put them on a level with the Indian races. With this feeling I have no share, for I hold strongly that if England has much to impart to India, she has also something to learn from her. There are moral elements surviving in Indian civilization,* which once flourished in Europe under the Catholic

* Cf. Burke's Speeches in the impeachment of Warren Hastings (vol. I. p. 48)

discipline, but which are now either lost or in abeyance there. I have often been impressed with this fact in reading those attractive but too partial pictures of the moral life of our own fathers which Mr. Kenelm Digby has given in his *Ages of Faith*. It is not, therefore, perhaps chimerical to hope that a closer moral sympathy between India and England than exists at present may help to revive among Englishmen the memory of some of those moral aims and types which our industrial civilization, absorbed in material ends, has undervalued or forgotten. Most persons who desire to bridge over the deep chasm between Hindoos and Englishmen hold, I know, that Christian supernaturalism affords the only basis on which connecting sympathies can be established: and Christian missionaries have done more towards creating such sympathies, I sincerely believe, than the advocates of any other opinion. Those who, like myself, have found it impossible, without intellectual suicide, to accept their basis, have no eager wish to thwart the efforts of Christian missionaries in this country, when we state temperately, but decisively, our belief that their work, at least among Aryan Hindoos and Mussulmen, is foredoomed to failure; or when we try, in our own way, to strengthen the moral ties between the East and West in the harmonizing medium of positive knowledge. Missionaries should bear in mind that their work among the civilized Indian races cannot be carried on without employing largely that negative criticism which they resent so sharply when it is applied to their own constructions. They must destroy before they can build. They cannot therefore, be surprised that some people should claim and exercise the same freedom of criticism in respect to their own systems which they apply, often with such remarkable ability, to the venerable creeds of India.

There is another consideration bearing on this topic which is often, I think, overlooked by the zealous advocates of Christian supernaturalism in this country. They are found of taxing natives with their subservience to social prejudices, and their moral cowardice in conforming to a creed in which they no longer believe. They forget that natives are not ignorant that English society is open to the same charge. Educated natives

who read our reviews and journals know well that English society is "honeycombed" with unbelief, and that many constant church-goers go only from habit, or for the sake of example, and admit freely in conversation that the dogmas of all the churches are irretrievably sapped. It cannot, therefore, be thought surprising that they are not very much impressed with the exhortations which are addressed to them with so much naive confidence. They are instinctively too polite to urge this retort, when they might do so with considerable effect. And yet Christian apologists, who are quite aware, or ought to be, of this state of things, this conventional reticence of polite society, seem on the whole to prefer it to open dissent. They imagine, I suppose, that there is no danger in thought, but great danger in speech. When I ventured to express an opinion last autumn that Christian supernaturalism was divided against itself, and slowly dying out wherever thought was most active in Europe, a great outcry was raised both here and in other parts of India. The opinion was hotly disputed on grounds which may probably be considered convincing in Jesuit seminaries (though the Jesuits, with their wide experience of mankind and their admirable dogmatic training, have generally a far keener appreciation of the perils of the situation than the Evangelical enthusiasts of the priests of the Anglo-Catholic and ritual revival), but which failed altogether to convince me. My chief offence, I cannot help thinking; was the shock which utterances of that kind give to the fiction, long zealously fostered in this country, of the practical unanimity of the ruling race in religious belief. It seems admitted that in Europe a few foolish or arrogant persons dispute the assumptions and deductions of the churches, but it is also gently insinuated that all good and reasonable persons are agreed in condemning their wicked and ignorant cavils, which indeed were all refuted long before they were born, by Butler and Paley. It is quite certain that statements of this kind are often put forward in good faith by zealous persons, and yet nothing is also more certain than the utter inefficacy of this prophylactic for the purposes for which it is employed. Intellectual natives are rather repelled than impressed by it, and perhaps suspect--though I am sure, without reason--the sincerity

of those who have resort to it. I have, therefore made it a rule in conversing with natives on religion, or in lectures addressed principally to them, to express my own opinions with the same candour and unreserve which I expect from them. There are many missionaries, I am sure, who will not resent this openness, and who will agree with me that English society would be none the worse for a little more sincerity and simplicity in the sphere of religious convictions.

THE CHURCH OF THIBET

GENTLEMEN,

In the fourth volume of Lassen's *Indische Alterthum-skunde* (pp. 713, 730) you will find a brief but tolerably full outline of Thibetan history, and its relations to Indian Buddhism. The plan of Lassen's book does not allow a complete exposition of theological doctrines, but readers who are not wholly unprepared will collect from those sections of his work which record the external fortunes of Buddhism a sufficiently clear idea of its theological content. Those who desire further information on this subject will do well to consult the *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism* by Burnouf, as well as the recently republished essays of Mr. B. H. Hodgson, formerly British Resident in Nepal, a man in whom all the Indian services feel a just pride. To his extraordinary diligence during his solitary residence in Nepal, and his munificent donations of manuscripts to the libraries of Oxford* and Paris, we are indebted for almost all our knowledge of northern Buddhism. Of the two works by Carl Friedrich Koeppen, to which Lassen directs his readers,

* An Oxford man can hardly read without a blush Mr. Hodgson's reference to the widely different fate which his munificent donations experienced in Paris and Oxford. In the former city they excited the curiosity and attention of a Burnouf, and in the latter they remained and still remain unnoticed. Such neglect seems at first sight incomprehensible in a place which is supposed to be dedicated to the advancement of learning. But, as Mr. Pattison has shown in his interesting life of Casaubon, Greek had pretty nearly the same fate in the 17th century. Its connection with ecclesiastical literature and controversy alone saved it from total neglect. In the high-tide of the "Catholic" reaction in Oxford there was, of course, no room or leisure for any interest in the religion of perhaps a third of the inhabitants of our