

THE BUDDHISM OF SIAM.*—Buddhism appears, of late, to have attracted, very much, the attention of Scholars in Europe. Though this far extended superstition is found, in the several countries which have adopted it, under a variety of forms and local peculiarities; yet there are certain general characteristics which render it at all times easily recognizable, as originally the same, in all countries where it has prevailed. But to trace its nature from the works, almost innumerable, which have been written on Buddhism, in the Bali or Pali language, is perfectly impossible: for with no religious creed has such extravagant and incomprehensible language been employed, in the delineation of its dogmas,—language which can convey to the reader's mind nothing but confusion. So long, indeed, as these voluminous writings confine themselves to the delightful regions of Magadha or South Bahar, (the birth place of Budha), they are intelligible; but as soon as they ascend to the celestial regions, and the Budhistic paradise,—or launch into the unfathomable depths of the metempsychosis, and the innumerable *Kalpas*, the reader is lost in a chaos of unmeaning words, or of the grossest absurdities.

The 'restorer of the peace and happiness of mankind,' in Siam is Sommona Kodom, who is said to have been born at Ceylon, or Lanka, as their sacred books call it. This individual was the founder of Buddhism in Laos, Camboja, and Siam. Whether he was a disciple of Budha himself, I have never been able to make out. His life is described as a series of the most benevolent actions;—he bestowed alms upon all who asked them; and he even went so far as to kill his own family, in order to feed the priests. Not satisfied with these outward actions, he practised habitual mortification of his body by fasting and prayer; whereby he acquired a fame for sanctity, and great renown amongst all his cotemporaries. In consequence of this great sanctity, he obtained power to work miracles, and to assume whatever size and stature he pleased. At one time, he appeared a mighty colossus; at another, he became so diminutive as scarcely to be perceptible. Things past, present, and to come, were all open before him. With the swiftness of thought, he could transport himself from one place to another. Great were his exploits,—incontrovertible his power! But, after the performance of so many great and wonderful actions, he died in a fit of anger, for having eaten pork. After death, he advanced to the highest state of happiness,—*annihilation*, while at the same time he remains the great benefactor of all that moves on earth. Another Sommona Kodom is yet to come, who will perfect the work of his predecessor, and restore eternal peace; after which all will move on, in unceasing metamorphosis, till the whole be swallowed up in annihilation.

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Such is the hero of Siamese *Budhology*. His votaries are very numerous. They have taken possession of the fat of the land. They live in a state of celibacy. Their houses, not dissimilar to cells, are built in the neighbourhood of their temples or pagodas. The greater part of the day they spend in idleness; but towards evening, as the sun goes down, they assemble to recite their vespers. The dawn of the morning calls them to the exercise of their mendicant functions; when they are accompanied by their disciples, carrying a large bason for the reception of food. They stop before every house, and receive from the inmates boiled rice, vegetables, and meat. With these supplies, they hasten homewards. As the food they receive is more abundant than they themselves can consume, they feed, with the remainder, poor people and animals. Being the only instructors of youth, they usually have some boys as their pupils, who, at the same time, act as their servants. The houses built for these priests, or *talapoy*s, are far better even than those of the inferior nobility. Thus, while nominally they have retired from the world, and renounced its pleasures, they are in reality far more comfortable than those who continue in the exercise of worldly business, labouring for such a numerous host of idlers.

Priests are present at all the religious ceremonies of the Siamese. They also repair to the houses of individuals, to recite prayers, and to initiate children into the duties of the world—which is considered a peculiar ceremony. In all respectable families, there are, at stated periods, a species of prayer meetings, or domestic services. On these occasions, a talapoy attends to recite prayers: which he reads, in a monotonous singing tone, from a Pali work. During this time, his auditors all remain in a kneeling posture. When he perceives that they have become tired and drowsy, he ends the service; and is then regaled with food; after which the assembly disperses. But the principal duty of a talapoy is to learn the Pali language. A few only acquire such a knowledge of it as to *understand* even the easiest works which it contains. The major part are satisfied when they can *read* it fluently.

The Siamese *nuns* are generally old, decrepit females, who act as the servants of the talapoy's. They are treated with very great contempt, and do not exercise any religious functions.

The vows of a talapoy are not binding. He may enter, leave, and re-enter the priesthood, at pleasure. Those, however, who have attained a high rank in the priesthood, find it difficult to leave their elevated stations, and descend again to the commonalty. On account of the great sanctity which attaches to the life of a priest, all the male population enter the priesthood, for a time; nor are even the princes exempt from this duty. As may be supposed, these novices are not very exact in the performance of the duties required of them. And after having learned a little Pali, they enter again into

the world. A talapoy is not amenable to the laws. If he has committed a crime, he must be secularized, before he can be punished. Even the king is required to pay his respects to these hierarchs, and to hear their exhortations, in the most humble posture.

A few of the maxims to be observed by the Siamese priesthood are here subjoined.

"Dig not the earth whereby that element is greatly insulted; which should rest undisturbed."

"Neither sit nor sleep in so high a place as that of your superiors."—The principal etiquette of the talapoys, as well as of the whole nation, is in the manner of sitting. Inferiors must crouch down before their superiors, which the latter occupy the first and most elevated seat.

"A talapoy who rides on a horse or an elephant, or who is carried in a palanquin, sins." He must avoid being burdensome to either beast or tree.

"A talapoy, who eats any thing that has life, sins." Even the kernels of fruits are included in the catalogue of prohibitions. The priests themselves cannot boil rice, for the grain is said to have life. Hence it is either given to them boiled, or their servants prepare it for them.

"A talapoy, who uses shoes that cover his heels, sins." Hence they wear sandals.

"A talapoy, who does not eat with crossed legs, sins." This is their general mode of sitting, as well when reciting prayers, as when—in the state of apathy which their law directs them to attain to—they are engaged in religious contemplations.

REMARKS ON THE COREAN LANGUAGE.*—The civilization and literature of the greater part of eastern Asia originated in China. In China, first, characters were formed to express ideas; in China sages and lawyers lived and taught; and from China, the other nations received their civil institutions. Corea, Japan, the Lewchew islands, Cochinchina, and Tonquin were successively reclaimed from barbarism. When these several nations adopted the Chinese mode of writing, they introduced also the original sounds of the characters; but as their organs of speech differed widely from those of the Chinese, they were either unable to pronounce them correctly, or they confounded them with similar sounds in their own

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language, which were more familiar to their ears. We find, therefore, a great variety in the pronunciation of the Chinese characters, among all the nations who have adopted them as their medium of writing; yet, even in this variety, there is a striking analogy with the pronunciation of the Chinese character in the Mandarin dialect, which is the true standard.

The more literature advanced, the more common the use of such phrases in the colloquial dialects became. Thus, though the spoken languages of the nations by whom Chinese characters were adopted, at first widely differed from the Chinese, yet they gradually became assimilated,—just as, by the adoption of Latin words and phrases among the barbarians who overthrew the Roman empire, their native tongue was gradually changed into a latinized jargon or *patois*. Nevertheless, the Chinese characters, when merely read over, were unintelligible to an illiterate native, unless properly explained in his native tongue; though the sounds were not entirely foreign to his ear. Thus two languages arose, one merely expressive of the sounds of the written characters, the other expressive of the ideas uttered. For the latter, the natives of the respective countries, above-mentioned, invented alphabets, strictly adapted to their own organs of speech.—These general remarks apply fully to the Corean language.

Though the majority of the inhabitants know how to read the Chinese written language, they have, nevertheless, for greater convenience, adopted an alphabet suited peculiarly to their own tongue, similar in theory to the Japanese syllabic system. The formation of the alphabetic characters is extremely simple, but at the same time very ingenious.

There are fifteen general sounds or consonants; which, with their characters, are, ㄱ ka, ㄴ na, ㄷ ta, ㄹ nal, ㅁ mah, ㅂ pah, ㅅ sa, ㅈ a, (or gna).