Persecution of the Buddhists in India.[1]

HUAN THSANG, in Book IV. of his travels (Julien 1. 196; Beal 1., 171), says that Mahirakula, King of Kashmīr, in his invasion of Gandhāra (which we may date approximately about 300 A.D.), overthrew the Buddhist Topes, destroyed the monasteries, and put to death six myriads of the population of that then Buddhist country; and Wong Pu, who wrote at the end of the seventh century, refers to the same events, when he says (Beal's "Catena," p. 139), "The end was the streams of the Sweti overflowing with blood."

Beal calls this a persecution. But the invasion of a country, however cruelly carried out, cannot rightly be so called. The murder and ruin attributed to the victor in this case were done after he had conquered and taken and killed his opponent, and annexed his kingdom. It was technically speaking his own subjects whom he slaughtered, and they were Buddhists. But the Rāja Taraṅgiṇī, which also describes the king as a monster, and says (I. 312) that he put to death three millions of people, says nothing about his motive being religious. On the contrary, his own ministers are described as Buddhists; and the account given, even if true in the main, is evidence not of persecution, but of fiendish cruelty. Possibly the man was mad; and when fuller accounts are accessible it may turn out that there was a persecu-

[1] An abstract of this paper was read at the Paris Congress of Orientalists, 1897.

tion. On the facts before us we must conclude there was not.

The beautiful story of Puṇṇa (Saṃyutta IV. 61; Divyāvadāna, 38) shows only that the Sūna-parantakas were people likely to treat violently, and even to put to death the propagators of new doctrines. Their behaviour reminds us of the verse in the Saddharma Puṇḍarīka (X. 25)—

"Where clods, sticks, pikes, or abusive words and threats fall to the lot of the preacher, let him be patient, thinking of me."

The victim himself might very likely call this persecution; but the historian will require a more strict use of the term.

We come perhaps nearer to this in the story told in the Dāthāvansa (P.T.S.J., 1884, II. 94, and IV. 13) of the enmity stirred up in a Hindu monarch's heart by the Niganṭha's statement that his neighbour Guhasīva, "reviling the gods, is worshipping the bone of a dead body." When the monarch sent an army to bring the bone, his ambassador (and afterwards the king himself) is converted. But other enemies arise, and Guhasīva dies fighting for the relic (IV. 20), which is safely taken away to Ceylon. Even this, though it may amount to a religious war, is scarcely persecution.

Then we have the references to Śaśānka, King of Bengal, who is said by Huan Thsang (Julien 1. 349, 422; Beal 2. 42, 91) not only to have destroyed the Bo Tree and replaced the image of the Buddha by one of Maheśvara, but to have overthrown and destroyed the religion of Buddha, and dispersed the Order. But though he cannot have reigned very long before the time when the pilgrim was in India (see J.R.A.S., 1893, p. 147), no details are given; however great Śaśānka's enmity to Buddhism may have been, we have no certainty that he actually persecuted the followers of that religion.

Then we have the account of Pushyamitra (described as the sixth in succession to Asoka and the last of the

Mauryas), as given in the Divyāvadāna, p. 433, 434. Here we come at last to what is represented as a veritable persecution. The king, it is said, not only determined to root out the religion of the Buddha, and destroyed the monasteries, but issued a proclamation that whoever should bring him the head of a *śramaṇa* should receive one hundred Dināras, and began to slay the Arahats. But the author of that passage admits that the persecution soon stopped, and in the absence of any confirmation of the legend we may be allowed even here to reserve our judgment.

The passage is interesting as giving us a date, or at least a king's reign, after which the Divyāvadāna (or rather the Asokāvadāna in which the passage occurs, for the different Avadānas in the collection are of different dates) must have been put into its present shape.

Pushyamitra is supposed to have killed the last Maurya (whose army he commanded), and to have founded the Sunga dynasty in the second century B.C.; but the only authority for this is the tradition preserved (with inconsistent details) in the Purāṇa lists of kings.[1] These are, in their present form, several centuries later than our text, with which they could be reconciled only by supposing that Pushyamitra claimed to be a Maurya. But if the claim be admitted, he was still not the last of them.

Finally, there is the account of the supposed persecution by Sudhanvan brought about, at the instigation of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, in the first half of the eighth century. This is described in the first canto of the Śankara Dig Vijaya ascribed to Mādhava; and also in the other Śankara Vijaya ascribed to Ānandagiri. The king is there said to have issued a proclamation that he would put to death any servant of his who did not kill the Buddhists. Nothing is, however, said as to whether the proclama-

[1] They are all given in Miss Duff's forthcoming "Indian Chronology," of which she has kindly allowed me to see the proofs. See also Lassen's "Ind. Alt.," 2. 271, 345.

tion did or did not remain a dead letter. No details whatever are added. No single instance of any Buddhist actually suffering in body is ever referred to. The order was to take effect from the Himālaya mountains down to Cape Comorin, which is palpably absurd. The statements occur in legendary poems written many centuries after the events referred to, and have all the appearance of mere rhetorical exaggeration. Of all the cases we have quoted this one seems to me to be the weakest, and to be only worthy of notice because it has been so often alluded to.[1]

The only other evidence I have been able to find is that of the state of the Buddhist monuments throughout India. Throughout the wide extent of that huge continent from Kabul down to Bengal, and southwards through the Dekkan to Ceylon, the Buddhist dāgabas and vihāras are in ruins. On excavating at Sarnath Major Kitto found so many signs of fire and deliberate destruction that he came to the conclusion that "all has been sacked and burnt, priests, temples, idols together, and this more than once."[2] And elsewhere, as I have myself witnessed in Ceylon, there are similar proofs of violence. But in the Ceylon case, where the chronicles give us fairly full accounts, it is clear that the Tamil invaders and destroyers were rather searching for treasure than seeking to destroy a rival religion, and the ordinary motives of vulgar warfare are sufficient to explain all their actions.[3] Religious animosity may have embittered the war, and played its part in the violence that followed after the victory won by overwhelming numbers. But

[1] See Telang's Mudrārākṣasa, Intro., pp. xlviii.–liii., and the Journal of the Bombay Branch R.A.S., 1892, pp. 152–155. Wilson, Dict., xix.; Colebrooke, Essays, 1. 323.

[2] Cunningham, Arch. Reports 1. 121–128.

[3] See especially Chapter 55, verse 21, and Chapter 80, verses 65–69.

this is not persecution. It is only reasonable to suppose that this case is a fair sample of what it was that really happened, wherever there was war and violence, in India proper also.

The Indian historians, however, give harrowing accounts of the brutality of the Muhammadans at Nālandā and elsewhere. At that ancient seat of learning they not only destroyed the buildings—without any military necessity—but burnt the books and murdered the unoffending students. It is impossible to deny in this case that religious rancour was as much to blame as mere ignorant savagery. And the signs of murder and arson at Sarnath are probably due to the same gentle hands.

There is nothing about persecution in the Pali Piṭakas. The murder of Moggallāna, at the instigation of Niganṭhas, is described only in the "Dhammapada Commentary," (pp. 298 and following; compare J. 1. 391), and then as a case of individual crime. The assault on Angulimāla (M. 2. 96) had no religious motive. The dislike and contempt expressed by the ascetic Māgandiya to his Brahmin friend against the Buddha because "he spies out our sūtras" (M. 1. 502), meets with no sympathy from the Brahmin, and the ascetic himself is represented as soon afterwards changing his attitude. The tone of the Pāli books is throughout appreciative of the Brahmins, the word Brahmin is always used as a title of honour, and there is always dignity and courtesy on both sides in the constant intercourse between Brahmins and members of the Order.

The later authorities I have quoted do not even allege anything at all approaching to the persecutions which the reforming Christians have had to suffer at the hands of the orthodox Church, or even to the semi-political persecutions of Christians by the Roman authorities. I need not go so far as to maintain that there is no truth at all underlying the legend about Pushyamitra. But the present text is corrupt, and even as it stands shows

that the author was grossly ignorant of all the details necessary to enable us to form a judgment. With that exception (whatever it shall turn out to amount to), the adherents of faiths logically so diametrically opposed lived side by side for a thousand years in profound peace. It is a phenomenon most striking to the Western historian, who will not refuse to recognise, as one continuing factor, the memory of the marvellous tolerance of the great Buddhist emperor Asoka. But this tolerance itself rests on anterior causes. It must be reckoned to the credit of the Indian people as a whole; and it is evidence of the wide spread, in the valley of the Ganges, during the centuries before Asoka, of a higher level of enlightenment and culture than has, I venture to think, been hitherto sufficiently recognised in the West.[1]

T. W. Rhys Davids.

---

[1] The Mahāvansa (p. 128) tells of the tolerance of the Tamil conqueror Elāra towards the beliefs of his Buddhist subjects, and (pp. 232–235) of proceedings taken by Buddhist kings against heretics of the same faith. See also Chapter 78.

[Since the above was in type I understand that Sir John Ware Edgar came to a similar conclusion long ago in an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, vol. xxvii., 1880, p. 821, which I am sorry I have not seen.]