A large, weathered stone reclining Buddha statue is the central focus, positioned diagonally across the frame. The statue is made of dark, aged stone with visible textures and some discoloration. It is reclining on its right side, with its head resting on a pillow and its left arm bent across its chest. The background features a wall made of reddish-brown bricks and a clear blue sky. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

*Buddhism  
and Christianity:  
A Parallel  
and a Contrast*

*Archibald Scott*

# **Buddhism and Christianity: A Parallel and a Contrast**

[Buddhism and Christianity: A Parallel and a Contrast](#)

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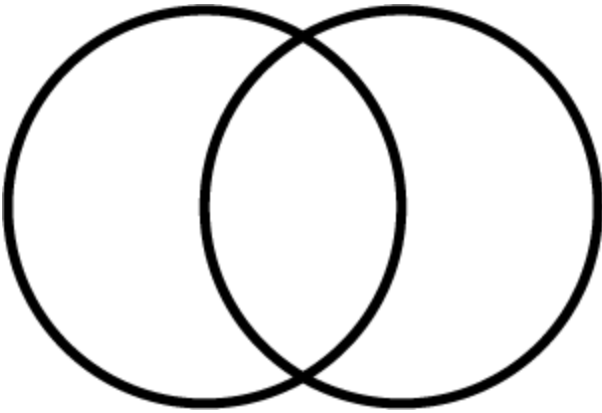
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# **Buddhism and Christianity: A Parallel and a Contrast**

**Archibald Scott**

# PREFACE



In endeavouring to sketch in so limited a space even the most salient features of the many-sided religion of Buddhism it is possible that here and there I may have misrepresented it.

If so, I hope the fault will be attributed to inadvertence, or rather to disadvantages under which I have worked. The sacred beliefs of any section of mankind are entitled to receive at our hands not only justice but kindly consideration, and a religion so vast and in some respects so wonderful as Buddhism ought to have much to commend it to our sympathy. Long and patient study of it has indeed greatly modified opinions originally formed concerning it, but it has only tended to increase respect for so earnest an effort of the intellect to solve the mystery of human life and destiny. Even Christians may have something to learn from Buddhists. The divers and seemingly antagonistic Churches of Christendom help to educate and reform each other, and non-Christian religions may perform a similar office to Christianity in bringing into prominence some universal truths which its creeds have allowed to slip into forgetfulness. Our perception and apprehension of what Christianity really is will be all the clearer and firmer for an impartial study of the system formulated so long ago by

Gotama the Buddha.

The aim of the Lecture has not been to use the extravagances of Buddhism as a foil to set off the excellencies of Christianity. That Christianity as a religion is immensely superior to Buddhism goes without saying, unless in the case of a very small and conceited and purblind minority. I have tried by a fair exposition of what is best and highest in this religion to discover its feeling after something better and higher still, and to suggest rather than indicate the place which it occupies in the religious education of humanity. As

“ Man hath all which nature hath, but more,  
And in that more lie all his hopes of good,”  
so Christianity, while having in it in fuller measure and clearer form every truth that has vivified any other religion, has in it, as the new creation to which the long travail of the soul under every form of faith has from the first been pointing, something peculiar and contrasted—which is the Divine answer to all their aspirations. This we do not need to demonstrate: indeed it may be a verity, as incapable of demonstration as is that of the existence of Deity or the immortality of the soul. It is sure eventually to be almost universally recognised, and meanwhile, whether accepted or denied, we may say— *E pur si muove* .

Very gratefully would I acknowledge my profound obligations to all who have instructed me in this subject. Though we no longer regard the Saddharma-Pundarika and Lalita Vistara as good specimens of Buddhism, we still venerate the great scholars who first introduced them to our notice. The splendid productions of Burnouf, Foucaux, Köppen, Stanislas Julien, Hodgson and Turnour; the excellent works of Spence Hardy, Gogerly, Bigandet and H. H. Wilson, and, among the best of all, the laborious and

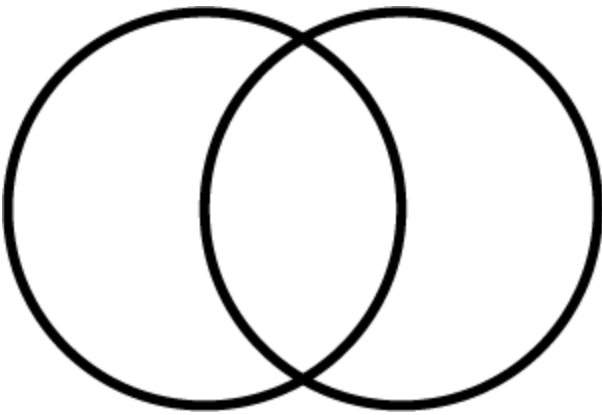
faithful Dictionary of Professor Childers, though several of them are unfortunately out of print, are not likely to be soon out of date. It is with pleasure that we find them so frequently quoted or referred to by our latest and best authorities. Still, ever since Professor Max Müller organised his truly catholic enterprise of the translation of the Sacred Books of the East, he has brought us very considerably nearer to real Buddhist teachers themselves. To praise the scholarship of himself, and Oldenberg, and Rhys Davids, and Kern, and Fausböll, and others of his *collaborateurs*, would be unwarrantable presumption on my part; but as a humble disciple very willing to learn, I am glad to have this opportunity of publicly expressing my appreciation of the great services which in their editions of old Eastern texts, and in these series of translations, they are rendering to the cause of religion.

The lectures were drafted and in great part written before I read the very valuable works of Sir Monier Williams on *Buddhism* and of Dr. Kellogg on the *Light of Asia and the Light of the World*. I specially mention these books as likely to prove very useful guides to any one desirous of prosecuting the subject of the present Lecture. In the notes I have marked my indebtedness to them, and to many authors of what has already become a great literature. Many others whose works have been of service to me in a course of reading extending over many years are not noted, simply because in the caprices of memory my peculiar obligations to them could not at the time be recalled. For in regard to Buddhism I do not profess to add any original information to the stock already acquired. Others have extracted the ore from these old and interesting fields, and minted it into gold and silver. What has thus been rendered available many like myself can only reduce into copper or bronze, but if only our work be faithfully done, we may thus help in increasing the currency and in extending its circulation. With this in view I accepted the

honour which the Croall Trustees conferred upon me in calling me to undertake this Lecture, and if the only effect of my efforts be to stimulate other ministers of the Church more advantageously situated to prosecute their researches to much better purpose, no one will be more pleased than myself.

ARCHIBALD SCOTT.

# LECTURE I. NECESSITY FOR A PROPER COMPARISON OF THE TWO RELIGIONS.



Early in this century Schopenhauer, fascinated by the contents of the Upanishads, which had been translated from the Persian into Latin by the illustrious discoverer of the Zend-Avesta, ventured to predict that the influence of the newly-found Sanskrit literature upon the philosophy of the future would not be less profound than was that of the revival of Greek upon the religion of the fourteenth century. [\[1\]](#) That century was marked by the close of the mediæval age, and the beginning of the times of Reformation in which we are privileged to live. The Reformation was not an event, but the inauguration of a period. Its significance was far deeper than that of a revolt from ecclesiastical superstition and corruption. It meant a quickening of the human spirit, and a consequent awakening of the human intellect, to which many forces other than the leading religious ones, contributed; and its effects are visible not simply in the changes which it immediately produced, but in the revolution which is still actively progressing in all our social, political, and religious relations. The movement designated by the Reformation is manifestly far from

having exhausted itself, and there can be no question that its course has been greatly accelerated by the studies to which Schopenhauer referred.

The re-discovery of India, lost to Europe for centuries after the beginning of the Christian era, almost as completely as America was hidden from it, was a fact of even greater import than the resurrection of Greece. It was no wilderness of ruins which was thus disclosed, from which only the shards of a long-buried civilisation could be exhumed, but a living and cultured world, whose institutions were rooted in an antiquity more profound than Greece could claim, and whose language and manners and religion were separated from the West by far more than a hemisphere. So totally unlike to the Western world was it, that the labours and sacrifices of several generations of the finest intellects of Europe were required before a key could be found to interpret its significance. Since the days when Anquetil Duperron, after many adventures and hardships, succeeded in breaking through the tangled thicket which guarded its treasures, the scholars of all nations have pressed into it, each one announcing, as he emerged, the dawn or the progress of another Renaissance, whose meaning and direction and ultimate issues only the rash will venture to predict or pretend to foresee.

One of the first-fruits of their combined or independent researches is the new science of Religion. By a careful collection, analysis, and comparison of all the beliefs of mankind available, with the view of eliciting what is peculiar to each, and what they all share in common, its professors aim at discovering what may be the real nature and origin and purpose of all religion. [2] As yet it should hardly be designated a science, for though the elements for it undoubtedly exist, they are too widely scattered to be of service for immediate induction. The materials already collected have not been sufficiently sifted, and moreover, it requires the assistance of other sciences, as yet too

immature, to render it effective support. The title may not be a “misnomer,” [\[3\]](#) but only a somewhat inflated expression by which an age, rather wise in its own conceit, proclaims the discovery of a new field of learning which it means assiduously to cultivate. The discovery however is a solid one, and the assiduity of those who would improve it is unmistakable; year by year their numbers increase, their implements improve in quality, and this generation may not pass away before an abundant harvest has been reaped. Another indication of the change that is coming over the world is the attitude which Christian divines now assume toward other religions. Fifty years ago the attempt to compare our Bible and our Creed with the scriptures of other religions would have been regarded as a sacrilegious surrender of what was holy to the dogs. This was due not so much to prejudice on the part of the expounders of Christianity as to aversion to the avowedly anti-christian spirit in which these researches were prosecuted. The Comparative method was then frequently employed, as it had been by the Encyclopædists of last century, for the purpose of discrediting and degrading Christianity. The conclusion was often foregone before the process began; and so it was natural that reverent but timid minds jealous for their religion, and anxious to guard it from insult, should decline such encounters. Now, however, orthodox theologians are quite aware that in this matter they have to reckon with other than the professed enemies of Christianity. The ablest advocates of Comparative Theology are not only free from antichristian prejudice, but they protest against it as inimical to the science itself. [\[4\]](#) It is not infidelity, but Providence, that is forcing us to investigate the origin of our religion, and to search its scriptures in the fuller light which we now enjoy. We are being divinely taught that we cease to revere a heavenly gift the moment we begin to idolise it; that the disposition most fatal to ourselves, most dishonouring to our religion,

is that which would regard its scriptures as charmed relics too sacred to be examined, and only to be brought by an undevout and apostate Church, in the moment of its extreme peril, into the field of battle with the Philistines. To shrink from the comparison of our Faith with the religious beliefs of those whom we acknowledge to be bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, is to manifest a cowardly lack of confidence in its Author. It is at the judgment-bar of all the ages that He means to make good His claim to be the Judge of all mankind. The more He is tried, the more will His authority be confessed to be divine. He certainly invited inspection and comparison, and He may have had other than Hebrew scriptures in His view when He instructed us to “search them, for they testify of Me.” [\[5\]](#)

The comparative study of other religions, so far from being prejudicial to the claims of Christianity, will be helpful in establishing its sublime pre-eminence among them, and in enabling us to discharge to their adherents the duty which its Founder has imposed upon us. It may modify considerably our theology, but it will strengthen our fundamental beliefs. As a general rule, we may assert that the strength of a man’s faith will be found to be in direct proportion to his knowledge of the everlasting and unchangeable laws by which the universe is governed. It is our theology alone that is assailed, and we are learning that theology, as a system of reasoning upon materials furnished not only by religion itself, but also by some other “ologies,” must be based on other and higher authority than that of an infallible Council, or that of a chapter whose significance was supposed to be unalterably fixed two or three thousand years ago. The religion which revolted against the assumption of the Scribe in our Lord’s day, and which disallowed the claim of the Pope some three centuries ago to be the sole interpreters of revelation, is not only testing the authenticity of the texts to which the appeal was then made, but is inquiring into their actual

significance by collating them with the truths of another revelation as divine. It is not that men want to get rid of dogma, for dogma of some kind there must ever be. There will always be a vast deal which we must believe, because there is much that can only thus be known; but a satisfactory dogmatic foundation must henceforth be sought in facts anterior to any scriptures, or to any church that would interpret them, viz., in the elemental necessities and aspirations of our common human nature. It has been wisely said that “the theology which fails to meet the demands of the whole man is simply doomed.” [6] What is wanted therefore for theology is some broad and solid basis, to be laid by analysing, comparing, and co-ordinating all religious beliefs within our reach. In each of them we may hope to find some truth—it may be very feebly and very partially expressed—of no more value by itself than a flake of gold found in an immense drift of sand or mass of quartz, but yet of immense value as indicating the source from which it came and the substance to which it claims affinity. All separate and imperfect truths point towards some higher truth which will unite and fulfil and interpret them. And so every religion, however erroneous it may be, is prophetic—because found in a humanity that is essentially one—of a universal religion, a faith which is not just one of the faiths of the nations, but is the divine answer, unchanged and inexhaustible, to all the aspirations of mankind. The study of other religions therefore, even of those of the most degraded peoples, and of those most contradictory of our own, is as binding upon us as is the study of our Bibles. For us “history” has been truly said “to stand in the place of prophecy,” [7] and it is only by gathering up and considering its testimony that we can appreciate the worth of the treasure which has been given to us, that we may communicate it to all the world. Prominent among the religions that challenge our consideration is the one which, following authorities

acknowledged to be the best, we will endeavour briefly to sketch and to expound. It is not an obsolete system, appealing only to the poetic sentiment from a vanished past, like the religion of Greece, but one which confronts us with vitality sufficient to overshadow a considerable portion of the populous East. Two thousand four hundred years have passed since it was first proclaimed, and though it disappeared long ago from the land of its birth, it still reigns in many kingdoms, and continues to spread its influence in several directions in Central and Northern Asia. To tell its story completely would be to write the history of nearly the whole of China, India, and the countries that lie around or between them. Till very recently it was generally computed that quite one-third of the human family, though widely separated geographically and otherwise, professed to find in Buddhism consolation sufficient to strengthen them to do the work and endure the sufferings of life, and to confront with calmness the necessity of death.

Were this computation correct, Buddhism would have to be accounted by far the most widely accepted of all the religions of mankind. It has however been seriously challenged by those whose experience and candour are beyond question. According to their enumeration, Buddhism must rank only fourth in the scale of numerical comparison among the great faiths of the world, for instead of there being five hundred millions of adherents, as we were previously led to believe, probably not more than one hundred millions of professing Buddhists can be found in all the world. [8] The question in dispute after all is one of only secondary importance, for we can hardly conceive of any one other than some democratic fanatic who would propose to settle the truth of a religion by a reckoning of the suffrages which it could command. Numerical statistics of religious adherence furnish only an indirect test even of influence. It is impossible to indicate even geographically

the range of a religion. We are very properly reminded that “the influence of Buddhism in India may be immense, though not a single Buddhist temple exists in it, while its influence in China and Ceylon may be vastly over-stated in figures, for many Chinese Buddhists may be called Confucianists and Taoists, and many Singhalese worshippers at Buddha’s shrines are far from being only or altogether Buddhists.” [9] Indeed everywhere, though chiefly in Thibet, Nepaul, and Mongolia, the religion which is called Buddhism is no more Buddhist than the survivals of Pagan worship and belief which are found in some extreme forms of Romanism can be called Christian. The rapidity with which and the extent to which a religion has spread is no certain indication of its capability to meet and satisfy the real spiritual necessities of mankind. A religion may rapidly gain, and retain for long, an ascendancy over many men, without possessing any of the qualities essential to its being recognised as the one religion of all men. The catholicity of a faith is indicated not by the extent of the supremacy which it has acquired, but by the quality of its contents. Universal truths are not necessarily the truths which have won the consent of the greatest numbers. The test of *quod ubique, semper, et ab omnibus* , if thoroughly applied, would have established the truth of many a degrading superstition in former times. “It is not that which is common to barbarism and civilisation which is most truly human, but precisely that in which civilisation differs from barbarism.” [10] The divinity of a religion, instead of being attested by the readiness with which it is accepted, may be indicated by the antagonism which it at first evokes. Truth at no time depends upon majorities, at least in this world, for here truth of any kind, when first proclaimed, instead of meeting a generally friendly reception, has to win its victory by conflict and lay in martyrdom the foundation of its throne. [11] It is not on account of its adherents, however, nor of the

superficial extent of its supremacy—though such facts have indeed a very pathetic significance—but it is in respect of the quality of its original faith, that Buddhism is considered worthy of comparison with Christianity. We must not be repelled by the childish superstitions and gross absurdities with which it is incrustated, for in a religion so ancient and extensive this is just what we might expect to find; nor should we be surprised at the marvellous and grotesque legends which profess to relate its origin and early history, for these, as Professor Müller has very properly reminded us, “are the clouds, not always rosy, that gather round the sunrise of any religion.” [\[12\]](#) In the estimation of its severest critics, Buddhism must occupy a grand and exalted place in the general history of religions. [\[13\]](#) Among the various systems of the non-Christian world, ancient or modern, none can compare with it in respect of its ethical code, its spirit of toleration and gentleness, and its beneficent influence upon many wild populations that have embraced it. Neither Zeno nor Marcus Aurelius conceived a higher theory of morals, in which justice and temperance were infused by kindness, than that which the founder of Buddhism successfully reduced to practice. It was the most natural of all things therefore, that it had only to be introduced to the notice of Christendom to win for itself a degree of admiration accorded to no other heathen faith.

We would be understating its claims, however, if we referred to it as appealing only to our Christian consideration and sympathy. It has been brought into the lists of criticism as the rival of Christianity. Modern unbelief is forcing it upon our notice as a much truer philosophy of existence and a more satisfactory theory of the universe than that furnished by Christianity. We cannot let it alone, were it for no other reason that it will not let us alone. In the civilised and semi-civilised portions of the East its disciples have long ago ceased to propagate it, and

as a form of belief it may be said that there not only has it reached the limits of its extension, but that its present condition is one of "increasing disintegration and decay."

[14] Even in the East, however, among the classes who have most come under the influence of Western culture, the spirit of Buddhism shows considerable vitality, and there its spirit is coming into constant and active collision with Christianity every day. The educated or intelligent Buddhist of Burmah or Siam tells us plainly that he will not give up his ancient faith for Christianity; for notwithstanding the manifold and manifest absurdities of his ancestral religion, he professes to find the same in the forms in which Christianity has been presented to him. By the light of our science we have helped him to weed out his old superstitions, and he will not accept from us any new ones. In language marvellously akin to that of the founder of Buddhism, he discards every religion as involving the worship of deity, and he professes to find in Suttas more ancient than our Gospels a morality as sublime, a charity as comprehensive, and a system of faith sufficient to bear the strain of all his necessities, whether present or future. [15] In short, Buddhism as professed by a modern Oriental with any pretension to culture, is almost identical with that paradoxical condition of thought or belief which maintains, and indeed professes to be spreading in Christendom as modern Agnosticism.

But it is not in an attitude of resistance only that Buddhism confronts Christianity even in the East. In Ceylon, if we are to trust the *Times of India*, [16] it numbers among its typical gains "a young highly educated European lady and a clergyman of the English Church," and these, it is averred, "are not the first, and are not likely to be the last of its direct converts from the Christian churches." In Europe and America also, not among the lower and less educated, but among the higher ranks of society, among people affecting culture and new light, are to be found not a few

professing admirers, if not practical followers, of Buddha and his law. The admiration of many of these dilettanti may sometimes be found to be in exact proportion to their ignorance of Buddhism. Their information is drawn almost exclusively from such sources as are supplied by the romance of Sir Edwin Arnold and works like those produced by Mr. Sinnett and Colonel Olcott; [17] but even when we discount all these, we must own that here and there we find some thoughtful and earnest people who profess to have come out from bondage to the beggarly elements of the Church's faith to gentle Buddha's better gospel of liberty. Mr. Alabaster's *Modern Buddhist* finds a co-religionist not only in the disciples of Feuerbach and Von Hartmann, but in every "fervent atheist" who, acknowledging nothing in the universe save man, and a system of unbending law in which he is involved, and with which he is sometimes confounded, has been compelled to deify humanity and to demand for its idol a service worthy of a divine object of faith.

So another prediction of Schopenhauer's, uttered in the beginning of the century, seems to be repeated in many publications at its close. "In India," he affirmed, "our religion will never strike root; the primitive wisdom of the human race will never be pushed aside by any incidents in Galilee. On the contrary, Indian wisdom will flow back upon Europe, and produce a thorough change in our knowing and thinking." [18] He certainly laboured hard to bring about the fulfilment of his prophecy, preaching Nirvana as the goal of moral effort, though confessing that his own animal propensities allowed him no hope of attaining it. In his lifetime his strenuous endeavours were unsuccessful, and he died in 1860 in comparative neglect. Since then, and especially since the publication of his book *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, the doctrine painfully planted, has taken root in the congenial soil prepared for it by Comte and his disciples. Spiritualism again—which, though

originating only in 1848, in circumstances almost ludicrous, has spread so rapidly and extensively that it now claims to count its converts by millions all over the world—has obviously contributed to the dissemination and growth of pseudo-Buddhist ideas. With a literature of over five hundred psychological works—many of them voluminous and very costly—and with forty-six periodicals regularly published in Europe and America, it not only assails Christianity, but supports the doctrine that “the Reign of Law has supplanted the Reign of God; that just as we have ceased to embody the conception of the State in a person, it is time we should cease similarly to embody the conception of the universe, for loyalty to a personal ruler is an anachronism in the nineteenth century, and will some day become extinct.” [\[19\]](#) Its apostles profess to find in the Christian faith many signs of disintegration, and they look “to the bloodless and innocent record of Buddhism for the reconstruction of true religious faith upon a permanent basis.” [\[20\]](#) This they expound in a so-called theosophy in phraseology largely borrowed from the New Testament, but descriptive of a curious amalgam of later Buddhist and Hindu doctrines utterly contradictory to the essential teaching of Christianity.

Occultism, Esoteric Buddhism, which professes to supplant the religion of Jesus, and to prepare the way of the twelfth of the Messiahs, whose mission is to harmonise the perverted teaching of his predecessors, [\[21\]](#) and thus establish the universal religion of humanity, is not likely to occasion serious concern. It is just another of those instances in which the diseases of a lower civilisation are communicated to one superior and more robust. Just as plagues originating in the ruined or degraded populations of the East have repeatedly desolated large portions of Europe, where they found physical conditions favourable to their spread, so there are mental and moral epidemics which, generated among inferior religions, propagate

themselves in the very highest, for reasons almost similar. There are modern conditions which present very close affinities to those out of which Buddhism arose. It has been truly called the religion of despair, and it seems suited to that intellectual *ennui* in which many profess to live who find themselves confronted by problems which they are unable to solve. The enervating agnosticism and sentimental pessimism of our generation furnish the very soil in which the germs of Buddhism are most likely to mature; but the spiritual life of Christendom is too robust to succumb to its heresy of inertia and moral defeat. The system of Buddha, even as laid out by himself, is not at all likely to entrap any considerable number of Western nineteenth-century thinkers; and this mongrel system of Neo-Buddhism, though professing to be founded on that ancient creed, will only find adherents among peculiar people. There is always a tendency in the most advanced civilisation, on the part of some who are freed from the necessity of industry, so essential to man's mental and moral as well as to his physical health, to revert to beliefs and customs peculiar to earlier and inferior stages of culture. It is a curious and significant fact, [\[22\]](#) that not among the working and professional classes, but among the upper and fashionable ranks of modern society, such survivals of ancient superstition as intercourse with spirits and palmistry are chiefly now to be found. For such unstable souls as have been or may be tempted to be drawn into these practices by an appeal to the authority of the beautiful character limned for our generation in the *Light of Asia*, I know no better restorative than a plain exposition of primitive Buddhism. It will be seen then that this modern fungus is a growth almost as foreign in its nature to real Buddhism as it is to true Christianity. The degenerate Buddhism from which it borrows its largest stock of ideas bears the same relation to the actual teaching of Buddha that the Cabbala bear to the prophecies of the Old

Testament, and the doctrines which it counts upon as most popular and attractive are precisely those which Buddha would have treated with his most withering scorn.

There is yet another characteristic of this religion which has commended it more to the unbelief than the belief of our age. Many agreements are alleged to subsist between the contents of the New Testament and those of the sacred books which profess to record the life and express the teaching of Buddha. Its ancient Pitakas are said to be filled with stories resembling the narratives of the Evangelists, with sayings which recall the parables, and miracles reflecting the signs and wonders which signalised the ministry of Jesus. It is averred that with the single exception of the Crucifixion—and how immense is the significance of that exception I shall endeavour in a subsequent lecture to show,—it would be easy to find in them a parallel to almost every incident related in the Gospel. Most startling of all are said to be the resemblances between the central figures in both sets of scriptures. For Buddhism, as truly as Christianity, has its ideal of a perfect human life, illustrated in one who, like unto the Son of Man, went about doing good, and enforcing by his example the pure morality which he preached, but who, most unlike the Son of Man, without any sustaining belief in deity, or hope of sympathy or help from any divine being, professed to have made good his own salvation, and to teach all whom he could reach the way to work out theirs.

When we come to examine its history, we find that it has followed a line of development strikingly parallel to that of Christianity, and the parallels thus furnished by its antecedents and progress, and by the external and foreign influences which encountered and modified it, are those which have the most interest and instruction for the student of Religion. In order, however, to ascertain their significance, we must examine these alleged

correspondences of story and of doctrine; for these have powerfully influenced a certain class of thinkers, as supplying confirmation of a charge brought against our religion in almost the beginning of its history, that after all there was nothing original in Christ, and nothing new in His teaching. That resemblances do exist, not only between the forms in which Buddhism confronts us in some quarters of the world and the ritual and organisation of a large section of the Christian Church, but between the contents of the Buddhist scriptures as we have them now, and those of the New Testament, all must admit. As we cast a hasty and general glance over them we see how natural and how pardonable was the old rough and ready method of accounting for them by the supposition of direct transference of the various lineaments from the one to the other. The early Jesuit missionaries did not hesitate to assert that the Buddhists, by assimilating and incorporating the rites and doctrines of the primitive missionaries, had succeeded in producing a caricature of Christianity. In like manner, when in Central America—till then as independent of Europe as if it had been separated not by untraversed oceans, but by the immensities that divide the planets—the Spaniards found to their amazement a most complex religion, with priests, and monasteries, and temples adorned with the cross and statues of a goddess with an infant in her arms, they could only explain the mystery by averring that it was a gigantic mimetic ruse of the devil to lead the unhappy nations astray. The suppositions in both cases are not likely to be seriously supported now. Indeed, it is far more likely, as the author of *Ancient Christianity* and Dr. Prinsep and others have attempted to show, that in the East we have to seek for the origin of several institutions and rites once considered the peculiar growth of Greek or Latin Christianity. There can be little doubt that as these religions spread they would come in contact with and react upon each other. [23] It is difficult in the present

state of our knowledge to indicate their first conjunction, or to trace their various intercommunications, but that they have been mutually indebted to each other is sufficiently attested by their histories. In later Hinduism and Buddhism and Lamaism there are plain indications of the action of the Western upon the Eastern religions. Romanism, on the other hand, has set its official seal upon the relationship, by incorporating a legend of Buddha among its "Lives of the Saints," by canonising the founder of this most antichristian of all religions, and by consecrating the 27th November as a day on which he may be invoked for intercession. [24]

Though as yet the field is only opening out, and its exploration is only beginning, there can be little doubt that it will be found that in their advanced stages Buddhism and Greek and Latin Christianity have contributed to each other's resources; but it is quite another matter to assert that the existence of the one religion accounts for the origin of the other, and that Christianity, as the junior of the two, is simply "a product of India spoiled in its route to Palestine." [25] Those who allege that the sources of Christianity may be discovered in Buddhism are bound not to assume but clearly to trace and demonstrate the medium of communication between the two. As yet the allegation, though frequently made, appears to be incapable of proof. Renan's picture of "wandering Buddhist monks who overran the whole world, and converted on the banks of the Jordan, by their garb and manners, people who did not understand their language, like the Franciscan monks in later days," is only a pious imagination. [26] And so are the theories elaborated by M. Emile Burnouf in the *Science of Religions* and by M. Ernest de Bunsen in his *Angel Messiah of the Buddhists*. Both these authors have explained to their own satisfaction the derivation of Christianity from old Indian or Aryan beliefs, which, transmitted through Parthia to the Babylonian Jews, by them communicated to

the Essenes John Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, and from them again passed on to the Therapeut Stephen, were formulated in the plastic mind of Paul of Tarsus into the Christian dogmas which we now revere. The scheme is devised with thoroughly French precision, and the treatises in which it is elaborated, full as they are of indications of great ingenuity and laborious research, are interesting as any romance. For scientific purposes, however, they have hardly more historic worth than a romance. Based upon assumptions, they are constructed almost entirely of hypotheses: when a difficulty emerges, it is solved by a supposition which further on is confirmed by a "reasonable expectation" of something else, so that by and by the supposition meets us as an established result. They abound in analogies, some of which transgress as flagrantly the laws of time as the theory once advanced that the story of Christ is only a reflection of the legend of Krishna, seeing that belief in Krishna did not arise in India till centuries after Christianity had reached its shores. "The laws of language [\[27\]](#) are also violated as openly as they were by the discovery that the mysterious word 'Om' of the Upanishads is the equivalent of the 'Amen' in ancient Hebrew worship." It may be as possible by this method to prove the connection between the Vedic and Levitical institutions, as it is possible to establish the conclusion that the old Aryan symbol of the fire sticks is the fontal idea of the Cross, or that the Vedic word "Agni" is equivalent to the Latin "Agnus Dei." Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter [\[28\]](#) and Professor Kuenen [\[29\]](#) have most exhaustively and decisively exposed the vanity of such speculations, which, on the whole, may be regarded as a good confirmation of a saying uttered by Professor H. H. Wilson some thirty years ago, in reference to those who would derive Christianity from Indian sources, that "the disposition to draw impossible analogies is not yet wholly extinct."

As far as the history of Buddhism can be traced it presents

no actual point of contact with either Syria or Egypt or Europe. Even after it became a missionary religion its progress was never westwards, and at no period did it reach further in this direction than the region now known as Afghanistan. The civilisation of the West offered no opportunity for its enthusiasm, and none of the great Western cities appear in its records. In the few scattered extracts which survive of the writings of those Greeks who visited India during or subsequent to the period of Alexander's invasion, there is no indication of a knowledge of Buddhism, nor any allusion to Buddha by name. We have to come down to the times of Clement of Alexandria [\[30\]](#) and of Bardesanes the Syrian before we have any tangible evidence of the slightest acquaintance on the part of the West with Buddhism. The first writer mentions Buddha by name, the second distinguishes his monks from the Brahmans, and gives some details as to their customs, but it is impossible from their statements to conjecture how much they knew of the faith to which they alluded, and most absurd to infer from them that they were affected with the slightest admiration for it. [\[31\]](#)

If Christianity be the offspring of Buddhism, or even if Buddhism exercised any direct influence upon its earliest development, some indications of that influence should be traceable in the Jewish and Greek literature of that period. Yet in spite of the most searching examination none have as yet been found, and it is not at all likely that they ever will be found. [\[32\]](#) Our religion was well advanced in its course before we find in the works of its defenders any sign of acquaintance with the Buddhist legend, or any expression of suspicion, as on the part of Cyril and Ephraim of Jerusalem in the fourth century, that the taint of some of the heresies which had infected the Church might be traced to its contagion. Then, unfortunately for the ingeniously constructed theory that the doctrines were secretly transmitted by the channel already indicated till

they reached St. Paul through Stephen the Therapeut, the only passage on which the existence of Therapeuts in Apostolic times could be founded has been recently proved to be a spurious interpolation in the writings of Philo of a treatise forged several centuries after his death. [\[33\]](#) Research can find no trace of Therapeuts in Alexandria nor anywhere else till Monachism had become the fashion in the Christian Church. Bishop Lightfoot has convincingly proved that the theory of the transmission of Christian doctrine from the Buddhists of India through the Babylonian Jews to the Essenes has not the slightest trace of evidence to support it, but that, on the contrary, the weight of evidence and probability is all against it. [\[34\]](#) Again, any one who compares the Gospel account of the life of the Baptist with the description given in Josephus [\[35\]](#) of the manners and tenets of the Essenes will find that just as the Essenes owed nothing to Buddha, so Christ, and even John Baptist, owed nothing to them. Though similar in a few external points, the Baptist's preaching and manner of living were essentially antagonistic to those of the little Jewish sect which had severed itself not only from Jewish society but from Jewish hopes. The teaching of Christ, again, whose manner of life, notoriously in contrast to that of His herald, was throughout a powerful though silent contradiction to every doctrine which the Essenes held, and it would be extravagant to assert that He owed to it even an illustration of His own. [\[36\]](#) It may be safely asserted that the theory of the derivation of Christianity from Buddhism breaks down at every point at which it is tested. We may dismiss it in the words of Professor Kuenen, that the "so-called connection between Essenism and Christianity cannot bear serious inquiry for a moment," and in those of the learned Bishop, [\[37\]](#) "that though the Essenes may have had some connection with Persia, their system was antagonistic to that of Buddhism in everything save the spirit of despair which called both into existence."

The whole supposition of Burnouf and De Bunsen, and writers of the school to which they belong, is based upon a most exaggerated and indeed fictitious estimate of the Indian contribution to the sum of human knowledge. It assumes that India was the cradle of all wisdom, and that from that favoured land of primeval light went forth from time to time the apostles of religion and the expounders of all philosophy. Yet history reveals not the slightest trace of any such propaganda westward before the coming of Christ, and though centuries after we have slight notices of Indian travellers to the West, we do not find a missionary among them. We have historic evidence, however, of the Western races reaching India certainly before the coming of Christ, and probably long before the birth of the founder of Buddhism, and we can hardly suppose that races with enterprise and intelligence sufficient to discover and conquer the Hindus would appear only before them as beggars to receive their alms. We forget that the wave of Aryan humanity that poured downward into India really deflected from the path of progress, and that under climatic and other unfavourable conditions, and through intermixture with inferior races, it stagnated, while that which proceeded westward improved the more the farther it advanced. We have a tolerably clear idea of the civilisation of Western Asia in the time of Solomon, whose navy is supposed to have traded with India. It comprehended capitals with magnificent buildings, public works, and well-guarded highways; commerce protected and encouraged; law administered; religion observed, and learning cultivated. What Indian civilisation meant at the same period we can only conjecturally infer from the literature that is extant, but we have clearer glimpses of it five centuries later as the home of a mixed race, geographically severed from the rest of the world, living in village settlements, which only here and there were large enough to be called towns, divided into clans whose wealth

consisted chiefly in pasture and tillage lands, and flocks and herds. [38] A kingdom in the sense in which Solomon would have used the word did not exist. In respect of civilisation Palestine was far ahead of India, and in respect of religious development, its theology, though greatly tainted with heathen superstitions, was sufficiently pure and strong to save the Hebrew from requiring instruction at the wattle huts of a race that confounded God with His works. If Ophir be the name of an Indian port, then Solomon's navy brought back from it gold, and ivory, and curious things indicated by Sanskrit words for which the Hebrew chronicler could find no equivalent. The sailors may have picked up a few fables and riddles and proverbs, but surely in regard to religion and philosophy, the superior and stronger race would be more likely to impart of their abundance to the lower and weaker than to enrich themselves out of their poverty.

When we come to the Greek invasion we move on more solid ground, and we can handle events which have left permanent and very traceable effects; but in the historic notices that remain, we have no trace of Hindu influence upon Greek civilisation. Instead of Greek religion and philosophy being enriched by the Indian, the opposite is more likely to have been the case. The invasion of Alexander must have originated a host of new thoughts in India, which may yet be traced in the works of the prolific Buddhist scholars, who are said to have lived in the Punjab during the period of the Greek domination. [39] It is alleged with fair show of reason to have given rise to some new products, such as the art of writing, a currency in coin, stone sculpture, none of which have as yet been traced in India in any previous period. [40] The appearance in India of the drama, the epic, of new views of mathematics, astronomy, physics, are all said to be subsequent to and consequences of the Greek invasion. And this is what we might expect, for all through the historical ages the Hindu,

instead of enriching Western nations, has been a needy borrower from them. He has always been more ready to absorb than impart, ever greedy of foreign ideas, and ever ready to be modified by external culture. The beneficent influence of India is indeed traceable in China, whose science it undoubtedly improved, and whose literature it has greatly enriched; but with the exception of the cipher so useful in our arithmetical notation, it is questionable whether India has contributed to the stock of Western wisdom one single religious or philosophic or scientific truth. [\[41\]](#)

The wealthy are more likely to lend to than to borrow from the poor; the wise more likely to teach, though they do sometimes learn from the less instructed. The strong may be infected by the diseases of the feeble, but generally the contagion of health radiates from the more robust to the weaker vitalities. The “power” which the touch of the East has “made to go forth from us” [\[42\]](#) no doubt flows back in quickened life upon ourselves. As these Oriental studies proceed, the tables will perhaps be turned upon the school that would derive all our philosophy and religion from old Indian sources. We have seen that two successive waves of Western life flowed eastwards upon the shores of India. Another rich stream of Semitic thought in pre-Buddhistic times, represented by such religious teachers as the second Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, reached the Tigris, and we may ask, Was the Indus unknown to them? We do not assert that they knew it, but surely it was just as easy for a Jew to reach India as for Burnouf or de Bunsen’s Buddhists to reach Babylon. It was just as probable that a Jewish pedlar found his way eastward through Parthia to India, with other and more precious goods in his possession than the Babylonian wares in his pack, as it was that Renan’s wandering Buddhist monk found his way to the Jordan. Later on there is a tradition—and though it is only a tradition, what a find to Messieurs Renan, Burnouf, and de

Bunsen would one similar Buddhist tradition be!—that one of the original twelve apostles of Jesus evangelised a portion of the western shores of India. So, founding on all these data, only assuming—as we are entitled to assume—that the East was well connected with the West by the sea routes from Arabia and by the land route through Persia, and remembering that there is nothing so volatile and permeating as thought, is the speculation so very extravagant that old Indian philosophy and religion, though following their own course, may have been modified and purified by contact with the thoughts of the West? What if the conjecture be hazarded that from the West a thousand years B.C. was communicated the theistic impulse which produced what is best in the Upanishads—the truth, viz., of the unity which is behind and above all variety, the One Absolute into which all thought and all being is resolved? [43] What if it be some day asserted that the teaching of the Hebrew prophets before the Diaspora, as to the worthlessness of sacrifice to put away sin and to promote communion with God, may have insinuated itself into the reveries of Indian ascetics in their forest retreats, and made the teaching of reformers like Buddha possible? And what if to St. Thomas may be indirectly traced that influence which made later Buddhism differ so materially from the primitive, and approach in the similarities of its legends so close to the Gospel narratives? Dr. Kellogg already proclaims that “it may be affirmed with certainty that no man can show that the legend of Buddha, in a form containing any coincidence which could be held to argue a borrowing from it by Christians, was in existence before the Christian era”; “that all the various versions of the legend in any language date from a time later than the Christian era”; “that the chief Sanskrit authority for it cannot be proved in the judgment of the most competent critics to have existed in its present form nearly as far back as the Christian era”; and though he does not allege any