EARLY BUDDHISM

EARLY Buddhism has to be distinguished from the later, which grew up together with the Brahminical systems long after Buddha had taught. We shall defer the consideration of the latter to the next Part dealing with the systems, and shall confine ourselves to the former, which is now variously styled as ‘Pâli Buddhism,’ ‘Canonical Buddhism,’ ‘Southern Buddhism’ and Theravâda (i.e. Sthavira-vâda, ‘the doctrine of the elders’). The founder of this great creed was born about the middle of the sixth century B.C. His name was Siddhârtha and he belonged to the ancient family of Gotama or Gautama. The title of ‘Buddha,’ which means the ‘awakened one,’ came to be applied to him afterwards, as a sign of the enlightenment which he had succeeded in acquiring and by which he woke to a sense of fact from the dream of life. As the details of his life are well known, they need not be recounted here. It is enough to say that he was born in an aristocratic family at or near Kapilavastu on the lower slopes of the Himalayas and was a young man of about thirty years when he renounced the world and left the palace for the forest in quest of truth. The immediate cause of the renunciation was the thought of suffering which he saw afflicted mankind as a whole. In conformity with the spirit of the times in which asceticism was the rule of serious life,1 Buddha betook himself at first to severe penance; but, not meeting with success in that direction, he began a fresh course of self-discipline characterized by less rigour. In this second endeavour, truth at last flashed upon him in regard to the nature of suffering and the means of eradicating it; and, true lover of mankind that he was, he did not spend the rest of his life in the forest in a mood of self-sufficiency, but quickly returned to the abodes of men and

1 It is recorded of one Ajita Keśa-kambalin, an ascetic teacher of the period, that he used to wear a garment of human hair—‘the worst of all garments, being cold in winter and warm in summer.’
began the long and noble work of spreading among the people a knowledge of the truth which had brought him illumination and freedom. The feeling which prompted him to such active beneficence is very well indicated by a saying which tradition ascribes to him, that he would willingly bear the burden of everybody’s suffering if he could thereby bring relief to the world.¹ In this work he met with many difficulties for there were at the time several rival doctrines contending for supremacy; but he persevered in his attempt and in the end achieved extraordinary success. His teaching spread widely in course of time and eventually grew into a world religion. It is, on the whole, one of the most remarkable developments of Indian thought. Its followers are now found in the remotest parts of the Asian continent, and it has been truly remarked that ‘for a great portion of the Orient, Buddhism was not less a vehicle of culture than Christianity has been for the Occident.’ Buddha died at a ripe old age. He is one of the greatest figures in the spiritual history of mankind and his life one of the most inspiring in its lessons to humanity.

Buddha wrote no books; and there is a certain amount of vagueness about his teaching, because it has to be gathered from works that were compiled a long time after his death and cannot therefore be regarded as exactly representing what he taught. That the account which these works give is not completely authentic is implied by the following story related in one of them.² After the death of Buddha, Purāṇa, an old disciple, came to Rājagṛha and was invited to accept the canon which the other disciples gathering together had meanwhile fixed; but he declined to do so saying that he preferred to hold fast to what he had learnt from the lips of the exalted Master himself. What we say in this chapter, being necessarily based upon such relatively late compilations, should be taken as describing Buddhism in the early stages of its history, and not as setting forth in every particular what Buddha himself taught. There are elements in it which are certainly the result of later thought and

¹ See Kumārila: Tantrā-vārtika, I. iii. 4.
² See Oldenberg: Buddha (Eng. Tr.), p. 344.
possibly also elements older than Buddha, which, though not included by him in the teaching, were afterwards incorporated in it by his followers responsible for the canon. These old works which serve as the basis for our knowledge of early Buddhism are written in Pāli, a literary dialect like Sanskrit, connected in all probability with the spoken language of Magadha. They are often in the form of dialogues and there is no methodical discussion in them of any topic in the modern sense of that expression. Thoughts are couched in metaphor and allegory, and to this circumstance also must in some part be attributed the indefiniteness of our knowledge of Buddha's doctrines. The works, if we exclude the large body of commentaries upon them, are three-fold and are described as the Tri-piṭaka, the 'Three Baskets of Tradition,' i.e. the three-fold canon or 'Bible of sacred documents.' They are Suttas or 'utterances of Buddha himself,' Vinaya or 'rules of discipline' and Abhidhamma or 'philosophic discussions.' Though the doctrine of these works is in essential matters different from and even opposed to that of the Upaniṣads, there is a general resemblance between the two. Indeed it could not have been otherwise, for each of them is equally an expression of the same Indian mind1 Upaniṣadic speculation may in a sense be regarded as having prepared the way for the peculiar teaching of Buddhism2; and often Buddha simply carried to their logical conclusions tendencies which we discover already in the Upaniṣads. Thus the whole tenor of the early Upaniṣads is against belief in a personal God; Buddha dismisses that conception altogether. Again according to many statements in them, the self is to be negatively conceived—as devoid of all attributes; Buddha eliminates the conception of self altogether. There are also other points of resemblance between the two, but the belief in the karma doctrine found in Buddhism serves as the clearest proof of its connection with Upaniṣadic thought. However much transformed in its new application, this belief finds a place in Buddha's

1 See Rel. V. pp. 2–3; Oldenberg: op. cit., p. 53.
2 See Bhandarkar: Peep into the Early History of India, p. 361; Prof. Stcherbatsky: Central Conception of Buddhism, pp. 68–69.
teaching; and it appears, we know, already as an important element in the doctrine of the Upaniṣads.

There are some general features characterizing Buddhistic thought which we may note before speaking of its details:—

(1) It is pessimistic. The burden of its teaching is that all is suffering (sarvam duḥkham). ‘All the waters of all the seas are not to be compared with the flood of tears which has flowed since the universe first was.’

Evil or the misery of samsāra is most real and the foremost aim of man is to effect an escape from it. When we describe Buddha’s teaching as pessimistic, it must not be taken to be a creed of despair. It does not indeed promise joy on earth or in a world to come as some other doctrines do. But it admits the possibility of attaining peace here and now, whereby man instead of being the victim of misery will become its victor. It no doubt emphasizes the dark side of life; but the emphasis merely shows that life as it is commonly led is marred by sorrow and suffering and not that they are its inalienable features. If Buddha in his discourses dwells upon the fact of evil, he also points to the way out of it. ‘Just this have I taught and do I teach,’ he is recorded to have stated, ‘ill and the ending of ill.’

(2) It is positivistic. Speculation was almost rampant in the period just preceding the time of Buddha and an excessive discussion of theoretical questions was leading to anarchy in thought. His teaching represents a reaction, and in it we meet with a constant effort to return to the hard facts of life. Following the traditional belief of his time, Buddha frequently referred in his discourses to worlds other than ours and to the beings supposed to inhabit them. That was partly a mode of popular expression which it would have been impossible to avoid for anybody using the language of the day. It was also partly due to his belief in the karma doctrine with its definite eschatological reference. Yet his teaching in its essence may be described as excluding whatever was not positively known. The authority of Vedic tradition, especially as regards ritual, he wholly repudiated.

2 Mrs. Rhys Davids: Buddhism, p. 159.
According to some modern scholars belief in the supernatural was part and parcel of the teaching which, they maintain, could not possibly have risen above the psychological conditions of the times. But its general spirit suggests the view, especially when we recollect that positivistic doctrines were not unknown at the time (p. 104), that Buddha did not recognize anything beyond the sphere of perception and reason. Such a view is also supported by the predominantly rationalistic lines on which, as we shall see, the teaching developed in later times.

(3) It is pragmatic. Buddha taught only what is necessary for overcoming evil whose prevalence is, according to him, the chief characteristic of life. The principle which guided him in his numerous discourses is clearly shown by the following story related in one of the Suttas. Once when sitting under a ṣimšupa tree, Buddha took a few of its leaves in his hand and asked his disciples that had assembled there to tell him whether they were all the ṣimšupa leaves or whether there were more on the tree. When they replied that there were surely many more, he said: 'As surely do I know more than what I have told you.' But he did not dwell upon all that he knew, since he saw no practical utility in doing so. It would on the contrary, he thought, only make his hearers idly curious and delay their setting about the task of exterminating evil. 'And wherefore, my disciples, have I not told you that? Because, my disciples, it brings you no profit, it does not conduce to progress in holiness, because it does not lead to the turning from the earthly, to the subjection of all desire, to the cessation of the transitory, to peace, to knowledge, to illumination, to Nirvana: therefore have I not declared it unto you.'

Deliverance from pain and evil was his one concern and he neither found time nor need to unravel metaphysical subtleties. He was thus eminently practical in his teaching. 'Philosophy purifies none,' he said, 'peace alone does.' It is sometimes maintained that Buddha was an agnostic and his silence on matters commonly referred to by other religious teachers is explained as due to a lack of certainty in his knowledge of ultimate

1 BP. pp. 26 ff.
2 Oldenberg: op. cit., pp. 204-5.
things. But it is forgotten that to so interpret the teaching of Buddha is to throw doubt upon his spiritual sincerity. 'If he did not know the truth, he would not have considered himself to be a Buddha or the enlightened.'

I

From what we have just stated, it will be seen that we have not to look for any metaphysics as such in the teaching of Buddha. He was averse to all theoretic curiosity. But, though there is no explicit metaphysics in his teaching, there is a good deal of it in an implicit form. There may be no metaphysical aim in what he taught; there certainly is a metaphysical view underlying it, which in its main outline we shall indicate now. There is a general resemblance, it may be stated at the outset, between this teaching and the assumptions of common sense in that it recognizes a distinction between a soul or self and a material environment in which it is placed. Early Buddhism is thus dualistic and realistic; but at the same time it is necessary to remember that we shall be greatly mistaken if we take it to have been either in the ordinary acceptance of the terms. The Buddhist view is profoundly different in regard to both for, as we shall presently see, it will be equally correct to say that in another sense it recognizes neither the self nor the physical world. The main features of early Buddhism on the theoretical side are as follows:—

(i) 'At any moment of our experience,' it has been observed, 'we stumble upon some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure.' The common belief is that these sensations and thoughts do not stand by themselves but belong to an unchanging entity known as the self. Buddha admitted the transient sensations and thoughts alone and denied the self in the above sense as an unwarranted assumption. To

1 BP. p. 63.  
2 IP. vol. i. p. 465.  
3 Cf. Prof. Stcherbatsky: op. cit., p. 73, where early Buddhism is described as 'radical pluralism.'
express the same in modern phraseology, he admitted only states of consciousness but not the mind. To him the sensations and the thoughts, together with the physical frame with which they are associated, were themselves the self. It is an aggregate or samghāta (literally, 'what is put together') of them; and Buddha declined to believe in anything apart from, or implicated in, it. In the expressive words of Mrs. Rhys Davids, there is in his view no 'King Ego holding a levée of presentations.'

The aggregate is sometimes described as nāma-rūpa, utilizing an old Upaniṣadic phrase (p. 63), though its meaning is here very much modified. By the first term, nāma, is meant, not 'name' as in the Upaniṣads, but the psychical factors constituting the aggregate; and by the second, rūpa, the physical body so that the compound signifies the psycho-physical organism and may be taken as roughly equivalent to 'mind and body.' That is, Buddha took as the reality—if we overlook for the moment the change in the meaning of nāma—the very things that were explained away as not ultimate in the Upaniṣads and denied the substratum which alone according to them is truly real. There is another description of this aggregate based upon a closer analysis of the psychical factors constituting it. According to it the self is conceived as five-fold, the five factors or skandhas, as they are called, being rūpa, vijñāna, vedanā, samjñā and saṃskāra. Of these, the first, viz. rūpa-skandha, stands for the physical, and the rest for the psychical, elements in the self. There is a little uncertainty about the exact connotation of some of the latter, but we may for our purpose here take them respectively to represent 'self-consciousness,' 'feeling,' 'perception' and 'mental dispositions.' This explanation of the

1 Buddhist Psychology, p. 98.
2 This expression seems to have retained at one stage in Buddha's teaching its original Upaniṣadic sense of 'name and form,' for nāma-rūpa is reckoned separately from 'consciousness' in what is known as the 'chain of causation.' See later and cf. Oldenberg: op. cit., p. 228 n.
3 But there was agreement between the two teachings in so far as both conceived the aim of life as escape from nāma-rūpa. Cf. Id., p. 446.
self, by the way, brings out clearly an outstanding feature of early Buddhism, viz. its analytical character and the predominantly psychological basis of its analysis. It is remarkable that of these two divisions, Buddha should have held, contrary to prevalent opinion, the mental to be more shadowy than the physical.\footnote{Cf. Mrs. Rhys Davids: \textit{Buddhism}, p. 133.} He said: Even the non-Buddhist readily grants that the body composed of the four elements—earth, water, fire and air—is not the self, but he sees his own self in that which is called 'mind.' That is, however, nothing more than an obsession. It would be less erroneous to call the body the self, for it may last for a hundred years; the mind, on the other hand, is ever restless, like 'the ape in the forest which seizes one branch, only to let it go and grasp another.'

The explanation given of material things is similar. Common sense believes that when sensations are received from outside, those sensations correspond to certain attributes like colour characterizing an object, say, a jar. To Buddha the attributes or sense-data are themselves the object, and he denied the existence of any self-sustaining substance apart from them. He dismissed it as a superstition, there being no means of knowing it as there are in the case of the attributes themselves, viz. the sense of sight, etc. Material things then, like the self, are also aggregates with no underlying unity whatever.

This doctrine is described in Sanskrit as nairātmya-vāda ('doctrine of no-self'). The term nairātmya, being negative, tells us what objects are not, while saṁghāta, being positive, states what they are. Thus according to Buddhism, when we for instance say 'It thinks' or 'It is white,' we mean by the 'it' nothing more than when we say 'It rains.' There are several parables in Buddhistic literature to bring home to us the full import of this doctrine, one of the best known being that of the chariot. It is mentioned in older books also, but is fully elaborated in the 'Questions of King Milinda,' a work which was composed in the North-west of India about the beginning of the Christian era and purports to give an account of the conversations between the Greek king
Menander and a Buddhistic sage of the name of Nāgasena.¹ One day when Milinda went to see Nāgasena, the sage discoursed upon the doctrine of no-self; but finding him unconvinced said: 'Great king, hast thou come on foot or on a chariot?' 'I do not travel on foot, sire: I have come on a chariot.' 'If thou hast come on a chariot, great king, then define the chariot. Is the pole the chariot? Are the wheels the chariot?' When similar questions were put about the axle and so forth, the prince was able to see that none of its component parts, when examined singly, is the chariot and that the word is a mere symbol for those parts 'assembled' or placed together in a particular way. Then the sage added: In the same way, the word 'self' also is only a label for the aggregate of certain physical and psychical factors. Not one of the objects of experience stands for an entity apart from the constituent parts. The important thing to bear in mind here is the sameness of the explanation given of both the self and the material world. The doctrine of nairātmya should not accordingly be understood as applicable to the soul alone as it is apt to be done. Both soul and matter exist only as complexes and neither is a single self-contained entity.

(2) So far we have looked at reality in a section as it were, ignoring altogether the element of time. When we take the same in time, this aggregate according to Buddhism does not continue the same for even two moments, but is constantly changing. So the self and the material world are each a flux (saṁtāna). Two symbols are generally used to illustrate this conception—the stream of water and 'the self-producing and the self-consuming' flame, the latter being particularly appropriate in respect of the self in that it suggests also suffering through its tormenting heat. It will be seen thus that every one of our so-called things is only a series (vīthi)—a succession of similar things or happenings, and the notion of fixity which we have of them is wholly fictitious. This theory of the ceaseless movement of all things with no underlying constancy is obviously a compromise between the two opposite views current at the time—one

¹ See Oldenberg: op. cit., pp. 254 ff.
believing in Being and the other in non-Being. 'This world, O Kaccāna, generally proceeds on a duality, of the "it is" and the "it is not." But, O Kaccāna, whoever perceives in truth and wisdom how things originate in the world, in his eyes there is no "it is not" in this world. Whoever, Kaccāna, perceives in truth and wisdom how things pass away in this world, in his eyes there is no "it is" in this world.'

Neither Being nor non-Being is the truth, according to Buddha, but only Becoming. From this we should not conclude that he denied reality. He did admit it, but only gave a dynamic explanation of it. There is incessant change, but at the same time there is nothing that changes. 'There is action, but no agent.' Language almost fails to give expression to this view, the like of which is known only twice in the history of philosophy—once in Greece when Heraclitus taught a generation or two later than Buddha and again in our own time in the philosophy of Bergson. Great indeed should have been the genius that enunciated such a doctrine for the first time.

Since there is incessant production, but no new things are brought into being, the world becomes the world-process—"a continual coming-to-be and passing away." Neither the world as a whole, nor any object in it, can be described as subject to the process. The process is the thing. The law governing this process is most vital to Buddhism and needs a few words of explanation here, although its enunciation in a general form applicable to whatever is produced belongs to its later history. We may begin by asking the question: If everything is but a series of similar states, what is the relation between any two consecutive members of it? One explanation given in Buddha's time of the fact of such succession was that it was accidental (p. 103). Another, though recognizing a causal relation as underlying the succession, introduced in explaining it a supernatural element like God in addition to known factors (p. 104). In neither case could man effectively interfere with the course of things. Buddha discarded both these explanations alike and postulated necessity as the sole governing factor. In denying chance, he took his stand on the

1 Oldenberg: op. cit., p. 249.
uniformity of nature; and in denying supernatural intervention, he dissociated himself from all dogmatic religion. This idea of ordered succession is no doubt really very old. It goes back to the conceptions of rta and dharma found in earlier literature. But they both suggest an agency operating in some unknown manner. The peculiarity of order as conceived in Buddhism is that it excludes such an agency altogether. In this, the Buddhistic view resembles the Svabhāva-vāda\(^1\) (p. 104). But it differs from it also in one essential respect. The Svabhāva-vāda regards the necessity to produce the effect as inherent in the cause. We need not, according to it, go outside of a thing to explain its history. Here no such inner teleology is recognized, for production, according to Buddhism, is not the mere self-unfolding on the part of the cause, but the result of certain external factors co-operating with it. It is necessary succession, but yet the constraint implied by it is of a contingent kind. It is contingent in so far as a series does not come into being until certain conditions are fulfilled; and it is necessary in so far as the series once begun will not cease so long as the conditions continue. The flame-series, for example, does not start until the wick, oil, etc., are there; but, when once it starts, it goes on uninterruptedly till one or more of the co-operating factors are withdrawn. Thus, though the law itself is universal and admits no exception, its operation is dependent upon conditions. This is the reason why it is called the law of ‘dependent origination’ or pratītya-samutpāda—‘that being present, this becomes; from the arising of that, this arises.’\(^2\) The Sanskrit expression means literally ‘arising in correlation with’ and signifies that if certain conditions are present, a certain product arises so that the nature of necessity as conceived here is not the same as in the Svabhāva-vāda. The implication of the ‘if’ here is that by sundering the causes sustaining the effect, the series can be arrested. This is stated in the remaining part of the causal formula: ‘that being absent, this does not become; from the cessation of that, this ceases.’ The consequent difference from the practical standpoint between the Svabhāva-vāda and

1 Cf. BP. pp. 68 ff.  
2 Mrs. Rhys Davids: *Buddhism*, p. 89.
Buddhism is immense. In the one, whatever is to happen must happen, whether we will it or not; in the other, there is every scope for human effort since a series, though begun, admits of being put an end to. It is only necessary that we should know what are the causes so as to get at them.\(^1\) The causal factors are determinable in their entirety; and the series they give rise to is therefore terminable, according to early Buddhism, at least in respect of the misery of existence whose removal is the chief problem of life. It was the knowledge of these factors, with the law of contingent causation implicit in it, that flashed across Siddhártha's mind at last and made him the 'Buddha.'\(^2\) Its chief significance for man is that since misery is caused in accordance with a natural and ascertainable law, it can be ended by removing its cause—a discovery which points at the same time to the positivistic and the practical basis of Buddha's teaching. The explanation was then extended to all causal phenomena. In this general form, it states that for everything that is, there is an adequate reason why it is so and not otherwise; and the causes accounting for it are at least in theory completely knowable. We have here the Indian counterpart of what is now known as the Law of Sufficient Reason. Buddhism may accordingly be described as having reached in those early days the modern conception of causation.

This view that everything changes from moment to moment is known as the kṣanika-vāda or 'the doctrine of momentariness'; and it is by that term that Buddhism is commonly alluded to in Hindu philosophical works. Buddha himself seems to have taught only the impermanence or mutability of things, excepting perhaps mind; but soon, through the force of its inherent logic, the doctrine was transformed into the general one of the momentary disintegration of all things. Its full development belongs to later times and we accordingly postpone further observations on it to the chapter on the Buddhistic systems in the next Part. There are, however, two obvious criticisms which may

\(^1\) Cf. Bodhi-caryāvatāra-pancikā, vi. 25-6 and 31-2.
\(^2\) See Oldenberg: op. cit., pp. 224-5.
be urged against such a view of reality to which, as well as to the way in which the Buddhist met them, it is necessary to briefly refer now. If everything is a flux and everything is being continually renewed, we may ask how recognition of objects—the apprehension of a familiar external object as the same we already know—is explained. The Buddhist states in answer that the things in the two moments of our cognition are only similar and that we mistake them to be the same. In other words, all recognition is erroneous since similarity is mistaken in it for identity. Another criticism is that if the self also be changing every moment, it becomes difficult to account for the fact of memory. Here also the Buddhist has his explanation. He holds that each phase of experience, as it appears and disappears, is wrought up into the next so that every successive phase has within it 'all the potentialities of its predecessors' which manifest themselves when conditions are favourable. Hence, though a man is not the same in any two moments, yet he is not quite different. 'The self is not only a collective, but also a recollective entity.' It is on this basis that Buddhism establishes moral responsibility. What one does, it is true, the same one does not reap; but he that reaps the fruit is not quite alien either and so far merits to come in for the good or evil that belonged to the preceding members of that particular series. In the Devadatta-sutta, which describes a sinner meeting Yama, the latter says: 'These your evil deeds, none other has done. You alone have done them; and you alone will reap the fruit.' The Jātaka stories again which recount the deeds of Buddha in former births all end with the identification of characters, though separated by whole births: 'I was then the wise white elephant: Devadatta was the wicked hunter.' That is to say, Buddhism denies unity in the sense of identity of material, but recognizes continuity in its place. If we represent two self-series as \( A_1 A_2 A_3 \ldots B_1 B_2 B_3 \ldots \), though \( A_1 A_2 A_3 \ldots \) are not identical and \( B_1 B_2 B_3 \ldots \) also are not so, there is a kinship among the

1 Mrs. Rhys Davids: *Buddhism*, p. 135.
3 Oldebergo: *op. cit.*, p. 244.
members of each series which is not found between those of the two, e.g. $A_1$ and $B_1$, $A_2$ and $B_2$, etc. We should therefore be careful how we understand the Buddhistic doctrine of the denial of the soul. As a stable entity which, without itself changing, appears amidst changing conditions—bodily and mental—Buddhism does deny the self; but it recognizes instead a 'fluid self' which because of its very fluidity cannot be regarded as a series of altogether distinct or dissimilar states. We may, however, observe in passing that in so stating his view the Buddhist has tacitly admitted a self transcending the experience of the moment. In the very act of analysing the self and dismissing it as but a series of momentary states, he is passing beyond those states and positing an enduring self which is able to view them together, for a series as such can never become aware of itself. Some are of opinion that belief in such a self is not merely the unintended implication of the teaching of Buddha, but an accepted element in it; and that its negation is an innovation introduced by his later followers.¹

The principles of impermanence and no-self are fundamental to the teaching of Buddha; and by enunciating them he may be said to have reversed at the same time both the truth of the traditional teaching and the belief of the common people. This unique doctrine starts by postulating certain elements as basic which are mutually distinct and which include both the physical and the psychical, and explains the whole world as produced out of them. But the rudimentary elements are as unsubstantial and as evanescent as the things they produce. The only difference is that while the former are simple and represent the ultimate stage in the analysis of the things of experience, the latter are all aggregates and do not, like the chariot of the parable, stand for new things. On the physical side, early Buddhism recognized only four bhūtas or constituent elements of material things, viz. earth, water, fire and air, excluding ākāśa,² the fifth commonly admitted by the thinkers of the day. These names,

¹ Cf. IP. vol. i. pp. 386 ff.
² Ākāśa also is sometimes included, but then it seems to stand merely for the field of experience emptied of its content. See BP. p. 02.
however, it must be remembered, are only conventional, for they stand for nothing more than the sense-data commonly associated with them, viz. hardness, fluidity, heat and pressure respectively. The material world, our indriyas and our bodies are all aggregates derived from these elements and are therefore termed bhautika to indicate their secondary character. On the psychical side, it similarly recognized a rudimentary form—citta, and explained the other features of mind as caïtta or derived from it. Such details, however, strictly belong to stages in the history of the doctrine later than the one we are now concerned with and we need not therefore consider them further here.

II

The practical teaching of Buddhism will become clear in the light of its theory as briefly sketched above. If all things in the world are transient and unsubstantial, our endeavours to secure any of them for ourselves or for others must be labour wholly lost. The very desire for them is a delusion and we should therefore wean ourselves from it as quickly as possible. More powerful than this desire for outside things is the craving for the preservation of the self or the will to be. Buddhism teaches that since there is no self at all, we should first get rid of this craving, if we have to extinguish the pains of existence. Thus self-denial is to be understood in a literal sense in Buddhistic ethics. There is a later Sanskrit saying, derived from a Buddhistic source, which states that belief in the being of oneself simultaneously posits belief in that of others and thereby gives rise to the whole range of narrow love and hatred.¹ With the negation of self, all selfish impulses necessarily disappear. Since the belief in self-identity which is the basis of suffering is false, ignorance (avidyā) becomes the true source of all evil. Here also then, as in Upaniṣadic teaching, evil is traced to ignorance; and in both, the way to escape lies through right knowledge such as is calculated to remove it. But once again, while the word

remains the same, the idea for which it stands is different. Avidyā is not conceived here as a cosmic power explaining how the nisprapāṇca Brahman shows itself as the empirical world, but merely as the ground of individual existence as is shown by the first place assigned to it in the ‘chain of causation’ to which we shall soon refer. Nor is it here, to look at it from another side, as in the Upaniṣads, ignorance of the essential unity of all existence, but the failure to recognize the hollowness of the so-called self. It is generally stated that this ignorance is of the Four Noble Truths (ārya-satya)—those concerning suffering, its origin, its removal and the way to remove it. ‘Not seeing the four sacred truths as they are, I have wandered on the long path from one birth to another. Now have I seen them: The current of being is stemmed. The root of suffering is destroyed: there is henceforward no rebirth.’

It is evident that in formulating this four-fold truth, Buddha was guided by the medical view of the time in regard to the curing of diseases, such transference of the method of current science to philosophy being not at all uncommon in its history. Buddha, who is sometimes styled the Great Healer, looked upon life with its suffering as a disease and his method was naturally that of a doctor seeking a remedy for it. We might say that the first three of these truths constitute the theoretical aspect of the teaching and the last, its practical. That suffering predominates in life, as we commonly know it, was admitted by practically all the Indian thinkers. The peculiar value of Buddhism lies in the explanation it gives of the origin of suffering, in the manner in which it deduces the possibility of its removal and in the means it recommends for doing so. To take these three in order:—

(1) The origin of suffering.—That suffering originates follows from the belief that whatever is, must have had a cause. Buddha found this cause to be ignorance in the last resort, as we have just stated. His foremost aim was to discover how it brings about evil; for if we once know the process, he said, we are on the highway to get rid of the

1 Oldenberg: op. cit., p. 240.
result it leads to. The stages of this process were set forth in a somewhat elaborate form which may be described as the special causal formula as distinguished from the general one to which we alluded in the previous section. It consists of a dozen links (nidāna)—Ignorance (avidyā), action (saṃskāra), consciousness (vijñāna), name and form (nāma-rūpa), the six fields, viz. the five senses and mind together with their objects (ṣadāyatana), contact between the senses and the objects (sparśa), sensation (vedanā), desire (trṣṇā), clinging to existence (upādāna), being (bhava), re-birth (jāti) and pain or, literally, old age and death (jarā-marāṇa). This ‘chain’ alludes not to the present life only, but includes a reference to the previous and the coming ones also. It exhibits the life that now is in its relation to the past as well as the future and stands for a sample of saṃsāra or the ever-recurring series of births and deaths. Without entering into a discussion of the details of this formula, about whose interpretation there has been a good deal of controversy, we may say that the first two of the links are retrospective. They refer to the life immediately preceding this one and hit off its general feature by describing it as ‘ignorance’ and its sequel, ‘action.’ It means that it is the activity of the past life prompted by ignorance that directly gives rise to the present. The course of the latter is traced in the next eight links, the earlier ones among which allude to the evolution of the organism, suitably equipped for the experiences of life and the later describe the nature of those experiences and their results. The last two links refer prospectively to the birth and suffering that will necessarily follow from the activities of the present life.\(^1\) Confining ourselves to the broadest features of this explanation, we may say that there is, first of all, ignorance which is the root-cause of the individual’s existence. From ignorance proceeds desire; desire, leading to activity, brings in its turn rebirth with its fresh desires. This is the vicious circle of saṃsāra—the bhava-cakra or ‘wheel of existence’ as it is sometimes called.

(2) Removal of suffering.—Just as it follows from the Buddhistic view of causation that suffering to exist must

\(^1\) BP. p. 105.
have been caused, it follows from the same that it must admit of being destroyed. According to the principle underlying the view, the removal of the cause removes the effect. So when ignorance is dispelled by right knowledge, the succeeding links of the chain snap one after another automatically. The process which gives rise to suffering, no doubt, involves a necessity; but the necessity, as we have stated already, is not absolute.

(3) The way to remove suffering.—The path of self-discipline which leads man to the desired goal is eight-fold: right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought, right concentration. It will suffice to refer here to a simpler scheme which also is found in old Buddhistic works¹ and which may be said to consist of the essence of the more elaborate one. According to this scheme, prajñā or right knowledge of the four-fold truth is the basis of the whole discipline. But if it is to result in a sense of freedom, it should be more than mere intellectual conviction, however strong it may be. It should be knowledge that has been transformed into our own experience and prajñā more strictly means this intuitive experience. Buddha insists that his hearers should not borrow their views from him, but should make them their own. He often declares that we must accept only what we ourselves have realized to be right. 'Then, monks, what you have just said is only what you yourselves have recognized, what you yourselves have comprehended, what you yourselves have understood; is it not so?' 'It is even so, Lord.'² In other words, every man should win his own salvation. It is salvation through self-reliance, not by the grace of God or under the guidance of any external authority. Even the guru can only show the way. For knowledge to become an internal certainty, śīla and samādhi are necessary. There can be no perception of truth without control of thought and action. Śīla means right conduct which includes virtues like veracity, contentment, and non-injury or ahimsā. Samādhi is meditation upon the four verities. It is an aid in

1 See Oldenberg: op. cit., p. 288; BP. p. 115.
2 Majjhima-nikāya, 38th Discourse.
securing tranquillity of mind and in gaining a clear insight into the truth that has been learnt from others. This part of the training includes, as in the Upaniṣads, diverse forms of yogic exercises, the details of which it is not necessary to consider here. These three together sufficiently indicate the scope of Buddhistic discipline. It is prajñā in the sense of insight or intuition, the outcome of the whole training, that will bring deliverance, while the same, in the sense of knowledge accepted on trust, marks the beginning of the discipline leading to it.

What is meant by right living differs somewhat in the case of a monk and a layman, and either mode of life may be followed, according to the capacity and inclination of the individual; but ultimate release is normally to be attained only after one becomes a monk.¹ Even in the monk's life, there is not that extreme severity of discipline characterizing some of the other Indian creeds, notably Jainism. We have already seen that Buddha's theory strikes a mean between two extreme courses, e.g. believing neither in Being nor in non-Being, but in Becoming; believing neither in chance nor in necessity exclusively, but in conditioned happening. The same spirit is reflected in his ethical teaching also. It is neither self-indulgence, which is the harbinger of pain; nor self-mortification, which is itself pain. Success lies in a middle course. True spiritual life is compared to a lute which emits melodious sounds only when its strings are stretched neither too loose nor too tight. In his very first discourse—the celebrated Sermon at Benares—Buddha said: 'There are two extremes, O monks, from which he who leads a religious life must abstain. What are those two extremes? One is a life of pleasure, devoted to desire and enjoyment: that is base, ignoble, unspiritual, unworthy, unreal. The other is a life of mortification: it is gloomy, unworthy, unreal. The perfect one, O monks, is removed from both these extremes and has discovered the way which lies between them, the middle way which enlightens the eyes, enlightens the mind, which leads to rest, to knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.'²

¹ BP. p. 131; Prof. Poussin: The Way to Nirvāṇa, pp. 114 and 150-1.
² Oldenberg: op. cit., p. 127.
The object to be attained by following this discipline is designated nirvāṇa. The word literally means ‘blowing out’ (p. 114) or ‘becoming cool’; and signifies annihilation—the ‘heaven of nothingness’ as it has been described. When it is reached, the constant procession of the five-fold aggregate disappears once for all. This of course is the view which accords best with the theoretical position of Buddhism, and salvation then becomes literally ‘the unmaking of ourselves.’\(^1\) But the extremely negative character of such an ideal unfits it to serve as an incentive to man for pursuing the course of discipline recommended for its attainment, and thus appears to defeat the very purpose of Buddha’s teaching. So other interpretations have been suggested.\(^2\) Some have flatly denied that nirvāṇa can be annihilation, and represented it as everlasting being or eternal felicity—an ideal hardly different from the Upaniṣadic mokṣa. Others again have taken it as a condition of which nothing whatsoever can be predicated—not even whether it is or is not. All that the term means, according to them, is freedom from suffering; and positive descriptions of it—whatever the speculative interest attaching to them—are irrelevant from the practical standpoint. But it does not seem necessary to resort to such explanations to show that nirvāṇa as conceived in Buddhism is worth striving for, because it does not really signify, as seems to be commonly taken for granted, any state following death. It represents rather the condition which results after perfection is reached and while yet the ‘individual’ continues to live. This would correspond to jivan-mukti, which, as we know, had been well recognized in India by Buddha’s time. It is a state when the passions and the limited interests of common life have been extinguished and the person leads a life of perfect peace and equanimity. It connotes a certain habit of mind; and he that has succeeded in cultivating it is known as an arhant, which means ‘worthy’ or ‘holy.’ It is this perfect calm to be reached within the four corners of the present life that the Buddhist aims at

\(^1\) IP. vol. i. p. 418.
and means by nirvāṇa, although as stated above an arhant after the dissolution of his body and mind may come to nothing. The idea of nirvāṇa understood in the latter sense (pari-nirvāṇa) need not stultify the teaching, for the goal which it presents as worthy of attainment is not annihilation but the state which precedes it. Annihilation is only a further consequence, not the motive of the training which Buddhism prescribes. That is nirvāṇa in the sense of ‘blowing out’ while the state of the arhant, which marks the transition from common life to it, corresponds to the other meaning of the word, viz. ‘becoming cool.’

There is one other point to which attention should be drawn before we conclude. The Buddhist believes in transmigration, but the belief seems to be inconsistent with his denial of an enduring self. Some have, therefore, characterized the doctrine as self-contradictory. Deussen, for instance, writes:¹ ‘This karmāṇa must have in every case an individual bearer and that is what the Upaniṣads call the ātman and what the Buddhists inconsistently deny.’ But there seems to be no justification for such a criticism. The belief in the karma doctrine really presents no new difficulty to Buddhism; for if there can be action without an agent, there can well be transmigration without a transmigrating agent. Further, we have to remember that according to Buddhism there is transmigration, or, more precisely, rebirth, not only at the end of this life as in other Indian beliefs, but at every instant. It is not merely when one lamp is lit from another that there is a transmission of light and heat. They are transmitted every moment; only in the former case a new series of flames is started. Similarly, the karma belonging to an ‘individual’ may transmit itself at death as it does during life; and, though the dead person does not revive, another with the same disposition may be born in his stead. If so, it is character, as Rhys Davids has put it, that transmigrates, not any soul or self. When a person dies, his character lives after him, and by its force brings into existence a being who, though possessing a different form, is entirely influenced by it. And this process will go on until the person in question

¹ *Indian Antiquary* (1900), p. 398.
has completely overcome his thirst for being. If we take this explanation along with what has already been stated that the self is here recognized as a continuity, though not as a unity, we see that there need be no inconsistency in Buddhism upholding the karma doctrine. For it admits both the implications of the doctrine, viz. that nothing that we do disappears without leaving its result behind and that the good or evil so resulting recoils upon the doer. Buddha, however, rationalized the doctrine to a considerable extent. For one thing, he dissociated it from all supernatural and materialistic appanages. In the traditional Hindu view, the allotment of pain or pleasure according to one's past actions was in the hands of a divine or some other transcendental power; and in Jainism karma, as we shall see, was taken to be subtle matter adhering to and pulling down the soul from its natural spiritual height. Buddha discarded both these views, and conceived of karma as an impersonal law in the sphere of morality working according to its nature and by itself.